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**Learning to be 'Teacher':
A Case Study of Ten Beginning Primary Teachers
in Urban Schools in Designated Areas of
Socio-economic Disadvantage**

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**Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Awarding of the Doctorate in Education (EdD)
Thesis Supervised by Professor Mark Morgan, NT MSc PhD**

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DECLARATION

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of the Doctorate in Education (EdD), is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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Date: 21st August 2009

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ABSTRACT

Adopting a symbolic interactionist theoretical framework, this thesis investigates the induction and socialisation experiences of ten newly qualified primary teachers in their first year of teaching in urban schools in designated areas of socio-economic disadvantage. In particular, it examines the manner in which their professional competence and professional identity evolve.

Accounts of the new teachers' experiences were garnered using periodic semi-structured interviews and termly reflective journals. This approach was complemented by the researcher's engagement in intermittent, unstructured classroom observation. The constant comparative method of data analysis was used to generate understanding about how the new teachers developed the capacity to become proficient and confident practitioners.

Family members, prior experiences of schooling and teacher education programmes variously influenced the new teachers' entry into the primary teaching profession and their early conceptions of themselves as teachers.

On commencing their first teaching positions, they were forcibly struck by the diversity of pupils' learning needs and the levels of socio-economic disadvantage. They attended to a broad learning agenda including planning and preparation, and lesson design and implementation. Meeting the demands for differentiation and assessment proved consistently challenging. The realisation of effective classroom management was equally onerous for many, most particularly for the newly appointed teachers in all-boys' primary schools. The co-occurrence of probation was a cause of additional anxiety.

Central to the beginning teachers' evolving conceptions of themselves as teachers was their desire to develop caring relationships with their pupils, to be effective classroom managers and to make learning exciting. The pre-existing culture of their schools and the nature of the relationships they formed with pupils, colleagues and parents variously served to enhance and challenge these conceptions. Levels of induction and socialisation support varied widely from one school context to another. With the progression of time the novices displayed a growing capacity to fulfil the various aspects of the role of teacher with increasing proficiency, success and confidence.

This study confirms that learning to teach is a complex and idiosyncratic process. Commencing one's career in a primary school in a designated area of socio-economic disadvantage can be rewarding and fulfilling if the necessary site-based conditions and supports are provided. This study identifies a variety of factors that facilitate or impede new teacher development and it presents a range of proposals as to how current induction and socialisation into such schools might be improved for the benefit of beginning teachers, their pupils and their schools.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND KEY ABBREVIATIONS USED

The following terms are afforded the same meaning and are used interchangeably to denote a qualified primary teacher in his/her first year of teaching in a recognised primary school:

- Beginning teacher
- Early-career teacher
- Newly qualified teacher
- Newly appointed teacher
- New teacher
- Novice teacher

The following key abbreviations are used:

DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools: An Action Plan for Educational Inclusion (Department of Education and Science, 2005a)
NPPTI	National Pilot Project on Teacher Induction

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CHAPTER 1

TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF BEGINNING TEACHERS' FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCES

1.1 Introduction

The process of becoming a fully fledged primary teacher is idiosyncratic and multifaceted in nature. This research is concerned with unearthing the diversity of experiences of a cohort of ten primary teachers in their first year of teaching in primary schools in designated areas of socio-economic disadvantage. In particular, it examines the manner in which the beginning teachers' professional competence is developed in tandem with the evolution of their professional identity.

This chapter begins by providing a general overview of the study and the rationale that motivated engagement in this inquiry. The subsequent examination of the underpinning theoretical framework, in tandem with an exposition of the personal framework and assumptions of the researcher, serves to make clear the intent, motivation and expectations of the research. The second section of this chapter serves to ground the career of primary teaching in the Irish context. It highlights the significance of the decision to enter primary teaching, the critical importance of the first year and the evolution of induction policy and practice in Ireland. The chapter concludes with an outline of the thesis chapters that follow.

1.2 General Overview of the Study

Much has been written internationally about the complexity of learning to teach. Within the Irish context, progress continues to be made in presenting a home-grown literature on the subject. The issues embedded in learning to teach and in learning to be a teacher are complex and convoluted. Commencing one's teaching career in a primary school in a designated area of socio-economic disadvantage adds a further dimension.

The purpose of this case study is to explore the experiences of a group of ten beginning teachers in their first year of teaching in urban primary schools participating in the Department of Education and Science's School Support Programme, Bands 1 and 2, under the DEIS Action Plan for Educational Inclusion (Department of Education and Science, 2005a). This programme focuses on addressing the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities.

This study affords primacy to the investigation of the professional learning experiences of the ten early-career teachers and to the manner in which their professional identity evolves over the course of their first year in teaching. In the course of undertaking this inquiry, the voice of the early-career teachers is paramount. Due to the dearth of recorded and accessible Irish research in this area, this study is intended to redress this deficit and to

contribute to a greater understanding of the processes involved in becoming a teacher.

1.2.1 Rationale for the Research

Within the Irish context much of the research to date on the experiences of teaching in designated areas of socio-economic disadvantage has focused on teaching in city schools. The study at hand is directed at the experiences of beginning teachers in town rather than in city schools and in so doing partly fills an important lacuna.

It is widely recognised that newly qualified teachers' experiences of induction strongly influence their decision to continue in teaching and for the majority who choose to remain, their effectiveness throughout their teaching career (Department of Education and Science, 2002). At a time of some concern regarding the recruitment and retention of high-calibre teachers in the education system generally and in areas of educational disadvantage in particular, it is crucially important to identify and investigate influences on job satisfaction among early-career teachers (Coolahan, 2003; Morgan & O Leary, 2004). The metaphor of 'sinking or swimming' is widely used to describe initiation into the teaching profession. Early-career teachers in schools in designated areas of socio-economic disadvantage ought to be facilitated to become successful, contributing members of their profession. Their entry into the profession should be structured "so that it is a period of

rich, continued learning and development that leads to success and expert practice" (Bartell, 2005, p. 6). The needs of beginning teachers working in such communities and the manner in which such needs can best be responded to from the perspective of the participants themselves have therefore to be understood.

The ultimate purpose of schooling is that of the learning of pupils, and the quality of education provided is inextricably linked to the quality of classroom teaching (Rowe & Rowe, 2002). The quality of learning outcomes being achieved by pupils attending schools in designated areas of socio-economic disadvantage is consistently under scrutiny (for example Eivers, Shiel, & Shortt, 2004). If centrally initiated targets for improvement in achievement levels are to be realised, such schools ought to be staffed by the most capable of beginning teachers, who are ably supported to develop their professional knowledge and practice. Learning to teach embodies multiple forms of learning, with many factors facilitating or constraining the development of early-career teachers' practice. Through the researcher's sustained engagement with a cohort of ten beginning teachers, some of that complexity is unravelled and the potential impact of such factors is identified. Greater understanding of the professional learning process will inform the improvement of professional development opportunities. Improvements in teacher socialisation into the profession are dependent on a fuller understanding and appreciation of what learning to teach involves.

1.3 Theoretical Framework of the Study

The process of learning to teach and assuming the identity of teacher is simultaneously personal and interactive. From the researcher's perspective, the theoretical orientation and conceptual underpinnings of symbolic interactionism respond successfully to this complex process of professional socialisation. The work of three symbolic interactionists in particular, Herbert Blumer, Charles Horton Cooley and Tamotsu Shibutani, provides a useful foundation for this study. Symbolic interactionism, as a conceptual framework, reflects an approach that strives to understand human behaviour and results in the provision of a more in-depth, contextualised understanding of that human behaviour (Musolf, 2003). In the context of this inquiry, it allows for the making of authentic interpretations of new teachers' experiences of commencing their careers in primary schools in designated areas of socio-economic disadvantage. It does this by affording primacy to the subjective meanings of the study participants and to the processes involved in becoming a teacher (Wallace & Wolf, 1986).

1.3.1 Symbolic Interactionism as a Theoretical Perspective

Herbert Blumer's (1969) primary concern was with how the individual and the group reciprocally affected one another. He concisely stated three premises on which symbolic interactionism is based and which are pivotal to this inquiry. The first of these assertions states that human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them.

The second claims that the meaning of such things is derived from or arises out of, the social interaction one has with one's fellows. The third premise contends that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he or she encounters. For Blumer, this process of self-interaction was critically important. He argued that it extended well beyond a simple interplay of psychological elements, such as emotions. Instead, it represented an instance of a person engaging in a process of communication with the self. Similarly, the accompanying process of interpretation was not a mere automatic application of established meanings but instead it constituted "a formative process in which meanings are used and revised as instruments for the guidance and formation of action" (Blumer, 1969, p. 5).

As central tenets of symbolic interactionism, they highlight the need in the current study to afford significant attention to the objects to which the beginning teachers attend, their associated meanings for them, their processes of meaning-making, and the manner in which these meanings arise in the process of interaction with others and with self. As such, beginning teachers define their situation as action unfolds and in turn they act according to their definitions, definitions which are formed through engagement in social interaction with others and with self. In order to access an understanding of this process of interaction, thinking, definition and action, attention must be afforded not only to the meanings the new teachers

bring with them into their first teaching positions and how these meanings evolve over time, but also to their interactional, situational and biographical origins (Bullough, Knowles, & Crow, 1991). In this context, the interactions of the early-career teacher with self and others are equally important.

The actions which result from this process of meaning-making are also deserving of close scrutiny. For the new teacher, action results from thinking rather than simply responding to externally imposed factors. While the level of effectiveness of such actions may vary, understanding how the newly qualified teacher takes account of the various things that he or she notes, interprets them and subsequently forges a course of action is critical. As Blumer (1969) asserted, "One has to get inside the defining process of the actor in order to understand his [or her] action" (p. 14).

From a symbolic interactionist perspective, beginning teachers' personal biographies are not judged as being centrally-determining factors in the evolution of self-as-teacher. The influence of such factors extends only to the extent that they are thought about and used by them to define the present. It is also important to note that individuals are not simply influenced by others. They too influence others, while also influencing self. While the ten new teachers who participated in this study commenced their careers in similar school contexts, the nature of the process of interpretation results in differing interpretations and resultant definitions of such contexts that are at variance

with one another. Consequently, differing actions among the new teacher actors emerge.

Our view of ourselves as human beings involves judgements and evaluations and the generation of feelings towards the self. The manner in which we think about the self and the feelings that accompany such thought result from social interaction. In expounding the notion of the 'looking-glass self', Cooley (1970) argues that such self-ideas consist of three principal elements: "...the imagination of our appearance to the other person, the imagination of [his or her]...judgement of that appearance; and some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification" (p. 184). Role-taking as such is significantly more than a mere reaction to another's behaviour, it involves evaluating one's self from the perspective of someone else, what Turner (1956) has termed 'reflexive role taking'. For the early-career teacher, much of his or her self-judgements are outcomes of interactions of significant others towards him or her as well as the new teacher's own actions towards him or herself. For the beginning teacher, such significant others include mentors, principals, and fellow probationers as each of these possesses an "intimate socialising capability" (Nias, 1985, p. 105). It is through the responses of these critical contacts that newly qualified teachers come to see themselves as others appear to see them. As such, they play a critical role in the early socialisation of beginning teachers. Such significant others can enable the new teachers to change and grow as they come to learn

more about themselves through this interactive process (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

In elucidating the interrelationship between self-judgement and social interaction, Shibutani (1955, 1961) asserts that it is not only significant others whose perspectives we assume to be in judgement of the self, but that such judgement function also extends to key reference groups. As in the case of significant others, our conception of self has its origins in seeing ourselves in how others see us, or in how we perceive that others see us. Again through a process of role-taking we assume the position of the other which in turn informs our internal conversation about the kind of person we think we are.

Taking up one's first teaching position brings the newly qualified teacher into a new arena of interaction in which a range of different others provide him or her with alternative images or interpretations of the emerging self-as-teacher. Chief among these reference groups are pupils, teaching colleagues and parents. As a result of joining a distinctly new social group, positive and negative aspects of the emerging self-as-teacher that have previously gone unrecognised may be foregrounded while the new teacher is simultaneously exposed to "new objects, new conceptions, new relations, and new types of behaviour" (Blumer, 1969, p. 67). New teachers' self-judgements of their professional competence and their accompanying sense

of self-as-teacher are significantly influenced by their interpretations of the actions of these reference groups. As a result the actions of these pertinent reference groups are made more or less meaningful as the new teacher strives to set a course of action to realise a desired outcome. For some, resultant actions may differ significantly from previous actions. For others, reference groups may be selected and utilised for their perspective-confirming capacities. As such, reference groups, and indeed significant others, may serve to promote or impede the development of newly qualified teachers' professional competence and professional identity.

1.3.2 The Appropriateness of Symbolic Interactionism

In utilising symbolic interactionism as a theoretical framework for this inquiry the researcher is very aware that as a paradigm, it does not represent a unified perspective. It does not embody a common set of assumptions and concepts that are readily agreed by all subscribers. It is frequently considered limiting because of its inherent need to focus on some aspects of reality which in turn results in a deemphasising of others (Charon, 2001). In addition, it can be argued that there is an absence of agreement about the use or relative importance of its various concepts. Symbolic interactionism's commitment to and practice of foregrounding the experience of lay actors has laid it open to much disapproval, most particularly by those who contend that such approaches present but a partial and incomplete picture of the social reality being studied (for example Giddens, 1976; Rex, 1974).

Attendant to this criticism is that of the inability of symbolic interactionist methodologies to unearth useful generalisations about human behaviour as a direct consequence of its preference for the use of participant observation and unstructured verbal accounts. Such data gathering approaches are considered to run the risk of being overly subjective, incomplete and possibly misleading, while simultaneously failing to take due cognisance of macro-sociological influences (Argyle, 1978; Bernstein, 1974).

Despite such well-articulated criticisms, the central assumption of symbolic interactionism of the mediation of human experience through interpretation is critical to this study. Its principal focus on how people define their world and how that definition in turn shapes their action provides a fitting perspective from which to explore the experiences of new teachers as they make their entry into the professional world of the classroom and the school. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, each of the ten beginning teachers who participated in this study is seen as being "active, creative and reflective" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 189). In their newly acquired environments they act as "interpreters, definers, and symbols and signal readers" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 25). The process of making sense of the social and physical aspects of these environments is achieved through the intra-individual, problem-solving process of thinking (Meltzer, Petras, & Reynolds, 1975).

As early-career teachers they are shaped by the responses of pupils, colleagues, management and parents alike. But they are also simultaneously capable of initiating behaviour and reflecting upon it (Nias, 1985). While significant others and reference groups in their classrooms and schools assist in the process of interpretation, the interpretation itself is undertaken by the new teacher. Through this interpretation, meaning is constructed and behaviour ensues. A particular strength of the symbolic interactionist orientation is that while acknowledging the possibility of the emergence of shared perspectives and definitions across the cohort of ten beginning teachers, it also prohibits the inevitability of consensus. Deviation from shared definitions as constituting truth is possible. Meanings are always negotiable, new definitions can be forged and differing courses of action can be subsequently pursued.

For the ten early-career teachers who participated in this study, their personality traits, their motivations and needs, their role obligations and their physical and social working environments among many other factors, are not consigned to oblivion as many critics of this theoretical orientation might suggest. Instead, they serve as important theoretical constructs in understanding their actions and experiences as they impact on and affect the process of interpretation. It is the manner in which these influences come to bear and the way in which the newly qualified teachers define and use them in specific situations that is critical.

The concept of self-in-formation is central to this inquiry. The writings of Blumer, Cooley and Shibutani provide a firm basis for the study of the interactive and reflexive process which constitutes self formation. For each of the ten newly qualified teachers, they enter their school and classroom contexts with a sense of self-as-teacher that is under construction. This emerging self is an amalgam of pre-existing meanings and meanings-in-formation. It results from their ongoing interactions with significant others, reference groups and self. Through a continual process of adjustment, a new or reconstructed teaching self emerges. However, throughout the course of this process, the new teacher takes an active role in his or her socialisation rather than merely adapting passively to the existing organisational culture of the school. Ultimately, the evolution of identity occurs within a social structure (Vryan, Adler, & Adler, 2003), in this instance the social structure of the school and classroom.

The utilisation of a symbolic interactionist framework has much to offer the study of entrants into the primary teaching profession as it focuses attention on the experience of work from the point of view of those who engage in it. In particular, it allows for the gaining of understanding of the situational learning engaged in by new teachers and the co-occurring development of their professional identity as they interact with the pre-existing culture of their schools. As Glaser and Strauss (1971) suggest, individuals' experiences of socialisation may be intense and deliberate, or subtle and accidental. This

remains true for early-career teachers' experiences of the school communities they enter. Professional socialisation has traditionally been seen as a process in which "certain aspects of a person's identity and life patterns are broken down (de-socialized) so that a new identity can be built up" (Light, 1980, p. 327). However, the adoption of a symbolic interactionist perspective allows for active negotiation by the new teachers themselves of ways of thinking, interacting and working.

1.3.3 Personal Framework and Assumptions

The possible subjectivity of the qualitative researcher in investigating phenomena continues to achieve much critical attention and as Berg and Smith (1988) advocate, the process of self-scrutiny is fundamental as a means of yielding "information about the intellectual and emotional factors that inevitably influence the researcher's involvement and activity" (p. 31). The perspective of this researcher is perhaps a paradoxical one: "it is to be acutely tuned-in to the experiences and meaning systems of others – to indwell – and at the same time to be aware of how one's own biases and preconceptions may be influencing what one is trying to understand" (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 123). In order to acknowledge the researcher's subjectivity, it is useful therefore to describe the origins of her interest in the learning experiences of beginning teachers and to outline some of the beliefs and assumptions brought to the research process.

Most of the researcher's primary teaching career was spent as a class teacher in an urban school in a designated area of socio-economic disadvantage. It was there that she developed her craft and sense of self-as-teacher. She learned the importance of knowing the curriculum and how it should be taught, but also of knowing the children and the families from which they came. She learned, sometimes painfully, that all that had been imparted in college and duly accepted did not necessarily work as had been anticipated. But she also experienced the joy of learning from what she did, the fulfilment of teaching well and the children enjoying and being enthused by their learning. She experienced the pleasure of getting to know the children, the idiosyncratic nature of their individual personalities, and she admired their openness and sense of fun and freedom. She experienced the pleasure of wonderful colleagues, most of whom displayed an unstinting commitment to the children and to the school. She enjoyed the community within which she worked, its rawness and its honesty.

She presently works as a primary schools' inspector and a significant portion of her time is spent evaluating the work of beginning teachers, providing her with regular opportunities to observe at first hand the socialisation of new teachers in schools in designated areas of socio-economic disadvantage. She encourages them to reflect on the work they do and she provides advice and support to assist them on their way. While she endeavours to engage with them in open and critical dialogue, she is always very aware that each

beginning teacher is unique, in the sense of the nature of person they are, their accompanying needs and the extent to which they may wish to engage in discourse with her. For them, she is ultimately the person who endorses, or otherwise, their competence as a fully fledged primary teacher.

Both of these vignettes are intended to provide an insight into the personal biography of the researcher and its contribution to shaping her interest in the research topic at hand and its consequential importance to the research process (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998; May, 2001). This personal biography, in tandem with a range of other life experiences and encounters, has led her to develop a range of beliefs and assumptions.

The first and most significant of these relates to teaching in schools in designated areas of socio-economic disadvantage. Such schools frequently receive a lot of bad press, but for her it was a wonderful environment in which to begin her teaching career, despite the challenges that were often inherent in everyday endeavours. While she was invigorated by it, she cannot make that presumption on the part of the beginning teachers who participate in this study. Some of them are equally likely to be affronted by it, particularly where this working environment is a new phenomenon.

Secondly, she believes that teachers should be committed and hardworking and that their ultimate responsibility is to their pupils and to their school. She

believes that they should be actively supported in developing their professional knowledge and practice and sense of self-as-teacher by the community of teachers with whom they work. In her current role as a primary schools' inspector, she finds it dispiriting when this is not the case, particularly where early-career teachers are struggling with their practice and with their sense of fit with their schools.

Thirdly, in her daily role as a primary schools' inspector she is engaged in evaluating the quality of the teaching and learning encounter from the perspective of the child. Is their interest being generated? Is their prior knowledge being purposefully exploited? Are they actively engaged in meaningful learning activities with their peers? Are their contributions valued? Are they having fun? Are their knowledge, skills, attitudes and values being developed? What is the teacher doing to make all of these things happen? In the context of the study at hand, the impact of the beginning teacher's practice on his or her pupils' learning is backgrounded to afford primacy to what the new teacher is thinking, feeling and doing.

Her fourth assumption is that beginning teachers have the capacity to reflect on and talk about their practice. The first year in a teacher's career is challenging and new teachers frequently struggle to respond to the multiplicity of demands being made on them. The researcher believes that through establishing a relationship with the study participants and through

intensive engagement with them, they will be able to enunciate their experiences in an in-depth and reflective manner that will provide a rich description of their reality of learning to teach.

Finally, in the eyes of the study participants, the researcher is assuming that her cloak as an evaluator of beginning teacher practice can be lifted and that they can engage openly and honestly with her. To aid in this process, she has relinquished all evaluative functions with regard to the study participants, including the fulfilment of an advice and support role. This has resulted in her taking a more passive stance towards their development while simultaneously attempting to engage in an interactive relationship with them in an effort to respond illuminatively to the demands of the research questions.

1.4 Primary Teaching as a Career in Ireland

Traditionally, the primary teaching career in Ireland has enjoyed high social status, which continues to be characterised by an over-supply of high-quality candidates for initial teacher education. Applicants for entry to primary teaching tend to come from the top quartile of the achieving students in the school Leaving Certificate Examination, and those taking the course for graduates are of a similarly high-calibre (Coolahan, 2003). The number of applicants who expressed interest through the Central Applications Office in entering primary pre-service programmes rose significantly in 2008

("Students take to safer routes," 2008, August 18), with postgraduate courses being vigorously contested by a wide pool of teachers-in-the-making.

In Ireland, there is a high degree of confidence by government (for example Government of Ireland, 2007) and the business community generally in the teaching workforce and in its contribution to the promotion of economic and social well-being. This belief in the value of the work done by teachers is also mirrored by parents and the wider society and brings with it its own unique demands and expectations. In this third millennium, the teaching force is seen as a crucial agent in the implementation of nationally desired change and as a result, the work of teachers and schools becomes increasingly bound up in the promotion of economic and social well-being. Consequently, major educational reforms are being implemented and teachers' classroom repertoires are expanding (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998) and becoming more intricate. For teachers entering the profession for the first time, such expectations of schools present particular challenges.

1.4.1 The Decision to Go Into Teaching

Significant among the choices for a career in primary teaching are the anticipated enjoyment of working with and caring for young children, the intellectual challenge that this activity will provide, and the capacity to help pupils to achieve their potential (Manuel & Hughes, 2006; Spear, Gould, &

Lee, 2000; Troman & Raggl, 2008; S. M. Wilson, Bell, Galosy, & Shouse, 2004). On entering the teaching profession, beginning teachers possess a nascent vision of the kind of teacher they want to be. As Manuel (2003) contends:

Each [beginning teacher] has already constructed an image of teaching, often rich with the altruism, idealism and even fantasy that can be so typical of the new teacher professional. Each no doubt aspires to be able and versatile in the art, science and craft of teaching; to be well regarded by colleagues and students; and dedicated to the holistic development of their young charges. (p. 139)

However, primary teaching is also chosen as a career because it is viewed as being a stable and secure job (Flores & Day, 2006), a factor likely to become increasingly significant in the present economic climate.

1.4.2 The Significance of the First Year

Few experiences in life have such a tremendous impact on the personal and professional life of a teacher as has the first year of teaching (Gold, 1996). New teachers have two jobs; they have to teach and they have to simultaneously learn how to teach. While their pre-service programme of education has laid a foundation and has provided practice in teaching, real teaching commences as soon as the new teacher crosses the threshold into his or her own classroom. As such, the first year of teaching is both crucial and problematic (Wang & Schwille, 2008); intense and formative. It strongly influences the kind of teacher an individual practitioner will become,

establishing patterns and practices (Bartell, 2005) and serving "to set the professional norms, attitudes and standards that will guide practice over the course of a career" (Moir & Gless, 2001, p. 109).

1.4.3 The Policy and Practice of Teacher Induction in Ireland

Calls for the provision of structured induction support for primary teachers in Ireland date back some two and a half decades to the publication of the Report of the Committee on Inservice Education (Government of Ireland, 1984). In 1991, an OECD Review of National Policies for Education (OECD, 1991) found Ireland's approach to induction to be both "ad hoc and incomplete" and advocated that induction should form part of a "coherent pattern of the professional career and [be] regarded as an essential component of a policy for maintaining the quality of schooling and of teachers" (p. 101).

The first half of the 1990s saw a raft of national policy publications advocating the introduction of a well-developed induction programme so as to ensure the formation of confident and professional teachers (Coolahan, 1994; Government of Ireland, 1992, 1995). Throughout this period the Standing Committee of Teacher Unions and University Departments of Education continued to advocate for the implementation of a continuum of support from initial teacher education through to induction and continuing professional development (Swan & Leydon, 1993). Similarly, the Irish National Teachers'

Organisation put forward cogent arguments for the introduction of systematic induction support for newly qualified primary teachers (INTO, 1993, 1994). However, despite the many and varied calls for the introduction of structured induction initiatives, induction provision continued to be unplanned and inconsistent, save for a relatively small number of interventions by university departments of education, teacher unions and education centres as well as informal guidance and support from individual schools. For the majority of teachers, the 'sink or swim' metaphor was to continue to apply to their induction experience, as provision for beginning teacher induction continued to be "uneven and lacking in structure" (Bleach, 1998, p. 55).

As the 1990s progressed, a number of significant developments placed the issue of teacher professional development centre stage in the educational policy arena. These included the reports of the Commission on the Points System, the Expert Review Groups on Teacher Education at primary and post-primary level, the Teaching Council, the National Policy and Advisory Committee, and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (Killeavy, 2001). The culmination of this range of pressures resulted in the establishment of a National Pilot Project on Teacher Induction (NPPTI) in Autumn 2002, as well as the allocation of responsibility for the induction and probation of newly qualified teachers to the Teaching Council (Government of Ireland, 2001).

1.4.4 The National Pilot Project on Teacher Induction

The National Pilot Project on Teacher Induction (NPPTI) comprises a primary and a post-primary pillar, with the primary pillar being located in St Patrick's College, Drumcondra. The general aim of the project is to develop proposals for an effective programme of induction for newly qualified teachers, which would be tailored to their professional development needs and be sensitive to the strengths, requirements and challenges within the Irish education system (Killeavy & Murphy, 2005). Its main objective is to support the professional development of beginning teachers by way of systematic support in their first year of teaching, thus laying the foundation for subsequent professional growth and development. The pilot project is now in its seventh year of operation, involving an increased number of newly qualified teachers and accompanying induction supports year on year. A key feature of the induction programme is the promotion of a whole-school approach to supporting newly qualified teachers. The novice teachers are offered support at school level by trained mentors. Release time for new teachers is intended to be used for planning, observation of experienced teachers teaching, observation by mentors and for professional development. Neither mentors nor principals fulfil a formal evaluative role with regard to the new teachers' professional practice.

1.5 Thesis Outline

This introductory chapter is followed by a review of the relevant literature in chapter two. Chapter three outlines the research design and the methodology employed. The findings of this inquiry regarding the ten study participants' entry into the primary teaching profession and the co-development of their professional practice and their professional identity are presented in chapters four, five and six. Chapter seven provides a final discussion of these findings in tandem with a summary of the main conclusions. It also addresses the study's limitations, the implications of its findings for the education community and possible areas for future research.

CHAPTER 2

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

In order to probe the complexity of beginning teacher induction and socialisation into the primary teaching profession, the review of the literature commences with an examination of the perception of pre-service education as a preparation for teaching. This is followed by an investigation of important factors in the recruitment and retention of newly qualified teachers, in particular in areas of socio-economic disadvantage. Once recruited, new teachers are exposed to a wide variety of induction experiences. Specific attention is afforded to the multiple purposes and manifestations of contemporary induction and to the implications of the co-occurrence of induction and probation. The second half of this chapter is devoted to an exposition of the pertinent literature that examines the professional learning processes engaged in by beginning teachers and the concurrent evolution of their professional identity.

2.2 Pre-service Education as a Preparation for Teaching

The effectiveness of pre-service education as a means of preparing teacher candidates for the classroom and school has received much critical attention (for example Department of Education and Science, 2002; Kyriacou, 1993; Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998). While the outcomes of such evaluations vary in response to their differing theoretical orientations,

purposes and design, the inadequacy of initial teacher education as a preparation tool is a distinctly common feature of such inquiries due to the evaluated incongruity between the pre-service experience and the first year of teaching (Wideen et al., 1998).

A number of such studies are noteworthy in the context of this inquiry. Each examination foregrounds a skills' orientation to the development of new teacher professional competence, even where that may not have been the intention of the pre-service programme provider. In an examination of the context of the United States of America (US), the beginning teachers in Schempp, Sparkes and Templin's (1993) study reported that while their pre-service education provided them with an understanding of curriculum and attendant teaching skills, primacy was afforded by them to the value of their engagement in teaching practice. The researchers concluded that prospective teachers' involvement in practical activity plays the most significant role in their construction of pedagogical routines and rituals. This results, as Garrahy, Cothran and Kulinna (2005) similarly found, in new teachers' most valued knowledge coming from self and other practicing teachers rather than from theory decontextualised from personal school settings. This constriction of early-career teachers' learning may in turn manifest itself in their first year in teaching in their clinging to ineffective practices and their failure to learn more beneficial approaches (Darling-

Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007), despite them having been consistently presented to them at pre-service education level.

A number of analyses of the impact of initial teacher education courses have been similarly undertaken in the Irish context. As part of the needs' analysis conducted during the establishment of the National Pilot Project on Teacher Induction (Killeavy & Murphy, 2005), the initial cohort of participating newly qualified teachers was asked to give their assessment of the relative effectiveness of their preparation for various aspects of teaching. In broad terms the teachers considered that the curriculum areas, planning a scheme of work and skills related to the teaching of subject matter were prepared for effectively. Timetabling, classroom management, and catering for special educational needs and mixed-ability teaching were considered to have received insufficient preparation. In support of the contention of Schempp et al. (1993), these new teachers also suggested that observation of experienced teachers, additional teaching practice and more practical methodologies would be of benefit. The theoretical aspects of education and subjects taken at academic level were considered to be of least benefit.

In a study of beginning teachers' experiences of their first year in teaching conducted in the same year by the Department of Education and Science's Inspectorate (2005), a similarly skills-focused orientation was adopted. This study found that in general beginning teachers felt that their teacher

education course had prepared them well for teaching the various areas of the primary school curriculum, though significant variation in self-reported preparedness was found to exist between individual curriculum areas. A majority of the newly qualified teachers was found to be confident in their teaching skills and they were assured in their ability to engage pupils and to ensure that pupils were progressing at appropriate levels. Among the negative references, a number of common themes emerged: a lack of confidence in teaching the curriculum to certain age groups; a lack of training in practical school matters; a lack of preparation with regard to planning; a lack of confidence in classroom organisation and multi-class teaching; and a lack of preparation in the learning and behavioural needs of certain categories of pupils.

The Irish and US beginning teachers' reporting of varying levels of preparedness to teach following the completion of their pre-service education needs however to be considered in its broader context. The classic and widely cited gap between theory and practice is a recurring theme in beginning teachers' accounts internationally (Hauge, 2000). As Churchill and Walkington (2002) suggest, many novice teachers view their college-based and school-based experiences as being distinct and separate learning entities. For them the real process of learning to teach only commences when they take up their first official teaching post. As such, they "may not see the relevance of their pedagogy courses to the process of

learning to teach and they may not attend closely to the information or experiences offered by the courses" (Borko & Putnam, 1996, p. 681). Even where the pedagogical theories acquired at college are remembered, many new teachers, as Flores and Day (2006) propose, may experience a substantial divergence between the 'ideals' of their initial teacher-education experiences and the 'real world' of classrooms and schools causing the implementation of pre-service acquired knowledge to be a more challenging and less relevant endeavour.

It should also be noted that many of the novice teachers who partook in these studies were experiencing for the first time the challenge and complexity inherent in being a full-time class teacher, an experience that is remarkably different to previous encounters of teaching practice. During this period, emotions run high and experiences of personal and professional vulnerability are particularly strongly felt (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). It is not surprising therefore that in an effort to maintain professional integrity and to minimise feelings of inadequacy that blame would be apportioned externally to the pre-service education experience. It would also be unreasonable to expect that the process of learning to teach would be completed during initial teacher education. As Feiman-Nemser (2003) asserts, beginning teachers have genuine and legitimate learning needs that "cannot be grasped in advance or outside the contexts of teaching" (p. 26).

2.3 Recruitment and Retention of Beginning Teachers

The recruitment and retention of high-calibre teachers is continually the subject of national and international debate and centralised policy response. Teaching in specific jurisdictions, such as the US in particular, has been characterised as an occupation with high levels of attrition especially among beginning teachers in urban schools (Lortie, 1975; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Veenman, 1984). Guarino, Santibanez and Daley (2006) conclude, that because these schools tend to have higher proportions of minority, low-income and low-performing pupils they in turn experience higher attrition rates. Such trends embody costs for both the individuals and the school systems concerned. As a recent OECD (2005) report on the recruitment and retention of effective teachers suggests, large private and social costs have been incurred in preparing people for a profession which they found did not meet their expectations, or was insufficiently rewarding, or which they found difficult.

In their in-depth investigation of the US experience, Ingersoll and Smith (2003) discovered that while poor salary was a key reason for beginning teachers' dissatisfaction, so too were pupil discipline problems, lack of support from the school principal, poor pupil motivation and a lack of teacher influence over schoolwide and classroom decision-making. These findings strongly point to the critical rôle played by working conditions in influencing new teachers' decisions to remain in or to leave the profession. The

significance of these school-site factors has been verified repeatedly across a wide range of research studies. Such key contributors to new teachers opting to leave the teaching profession include: an excessive workload (for example Heafford & Jennison, 1998; Kyriacou & Kunc, 2007), the influence of disruptive pupils (for example Veenman, 1984; Webb et al., 2004) and the lack of professional support (for example Goddard & O'Brien, 2003; E. Wilson & Demetriou, 2006).

In a similar vein, Johnson and Birkeland's (2003) Massachusetts-based study of the school-site factors that influence teacher efficacy and decision-making embodies particular resonance for this inquiry. In their research, new teachers who opted to leave the profession spoke of principals who were neglectful, colleagues who failed to support them as they struggled to teach, and overwhelming and inappropriate teaching assignments. Where teachers chose to remain in teaching but opted to move to another school, they transferred to schools that offered well-established norms of respect, effective discipline systems, deliberate approaches to parental involvement, structured support for new teachers and schoolwide collegial interaction.

Of those who opted to stay in the less-advantaged schools in which they had secured their initial posts, they attributed their satisfaction to factors similar to those cited by teachers in wealthier, less diverse schools: supportive principals and colleagues, clear expectations of pupils, and safe, orderly

environments. This finding is supported in the Irish context by a recent study of beginning teachers' reported job satisfaction as conducted by Morgan and O Leary (2004). They found that the designation of a school by the Department of Education and Science as serving a disadvantaged area was not associated with any difference in satisfaction between teachers teaching in designated and non-designated areas, indicating that the designated schools in which the new teachers had secured employment manifested many of the school-site characteristics and working conditions desired by them.

While Ireland does not appear to have a significant problem in retaining effective primary teachers, overall recruitment and retention figures serve to mask fundamental differences inherent in the system, in particular regarding staffing in schools in areas of socio-economic disadvantage. Definitive statistics on recruitment and retention rates are not centrally maintained, although it has been established that teacher turnover in schools serving severely disadvantaged areas is high (Coolahan, 2003). In a 2002 survey of disadvantaged schools, conducted on behalf of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation, it indicated that almost ten per cent of teachers in such schools leave each year because of pressures in their jobs (as cited in Coolahan, 2003, p. 9). This trend is reiterated in the Action Plan of the National Forum on Primary Education: Ending Disadvantage (Gilligan, 2002). The regular turnover of qualified and experienced teachers results in

such schools having a greater proportion of newly qualified, inexperienced teachers in comparison to schools nationally.

The difficulty of teacher retention does not simply cause staffing problems. In her evaluation of the public school system in California, Darling-Hammond (2004) found that pupil achievement gains were much more influenced by a pupil's assigned teacher than other factors like class size and composition. In jurisdictions in which high levels of teacher turnover persist, negative impacts on pupil achievement are liable to be more prevalent as the pupils in such schools experience a higher frequency of newly qualified and less experienced teachers in the course of their primary school career. In areas of socio-economic disadvantage, this constitutes a significant threat to the espoused achievement of equality of educational opportunity, participation and outcome.

2.4 Beginning Teacher Induction

As a profession, teaching is quite unique as the beginning teacher assumes all the roles and responsibilities of their more experienced colleagues from the outset, with minimal material or other allowances being made for their newness (Coolahan, 2003; Manuel, 2003; Renard, 2003). Sarason (1990) argues that schools have traditionally been oblivious to the importance and inactive in the provision of systematic support for new teachers, believing that learning to teach was a challenge that was privately met within the

confines of the classroom. Given comparisons to fields such as medicine and law, some observers have dubbed education as "the profession that eats its young" (Halford, 1998, p. 33) and in which the initiation of new teachers is akin to "sink or swim, trial-by-fire or boot-camp" (Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004, p. 2). Even in school contexts where novices are not fully left to their own devices, induction is regularly limited to informal and occasional advice and support from well-meaning colleagues or, as the OECD (2005) concludes, "formal orientation in one-shot or low-frequency events" (p. 120).

In more recent years however the need for organised programmes of induction to support the entry of new teachers into the primary teaching profession has been universally accepted. In many jurisdictions it is driven by statute or external mandate (Williams, Prestage, & Bedward, 2001), but also by a belief that well-conceived and well-implemented programmes are successful in increasing the job satisfaction, efficacy and retention of new teachers (J. H. Holloway, 2001; Olebe, 2001; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Beginning teacher induction is most often framed as being a transition from initial teacher education to practice in the classroom, a movement from knowing about teaching to knowing how to teach, a period "in which content knowledge and pedagogical skills move in tandem through teaching, observation, dialogue and reflection" (Fulton, Yoon, & Lee, 2005, p. 22). The particular manner in which induction manifests itself across differing jurisdictions is reflective of a divergence of views about its fundamental goals

and purposes. Common aims include a desire to orient the new teacher to the profession and the school; the commitment to providing personal and professional support; the provision of opportunities to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes essential for effective teaching; and the evaluation of beginning teacher competence and effectiveness.

Learning to teach is both complex and highly individualised. Irrespective of the course of initial teacher education undertaken, newly qualified teachers display varying levels of preparedness to teach and they find themselves teaching in schools and communities that differ dramatically in nature. As Bartell (2005) asserts, they bring specific needs that stem directly from their novice status: the need to become familiar with their school; the need to effectively manage curriculum and instruction; the need to know what to teach and how best to teach it to their particular pupils; the need to be able to relate to the lives and cultures represented in the classroom; the need to manage their classroom; the need to navigate the politics of the school and the wider profession; and the need to make the psychological adjustments in response to the demands and stresses of the job. For induction support to be effective, Wildman, Niles, Magliaro and McLaughlin (1989) in turn argue that it needs to be responsive to the variability of personal, professional and contextual factors, organised to meet individual teachers' needs and stages of development and grounded in the specific classroom context within which they teach.

Successful induction programmes possess a range of common characteristics of which a clear vision of good teaching and the successful teacher is critical (Bubb, 2007). In such contexts induction is viewed not as a means of ensuring teacher retention but as a means of assisting beginning teachers to reach their potential and to enhance the learning of their pupils (Britton & Paine, 2005). Programmes that have clear and inclusive goals, strategies and content, and which adopt a developmental stance to new teacher induction are more successful (Moskowitz & Stephens, 1996). They provide multiple supports including information; demonstration; observation; mentoring; feedback; external networks; and targeted professional development activities (Commonwealth Department of Education Science and Training, 2002; Fulton et al., 2005; Joyce & Showers, 2002). They provide sufficient dedicated time for beginning teachers to develop a professional identity and to consolidate a professional practice. They acknowledge teachers' individualised strengths and needs, and capitalise on their creative potential and professional commitment (Tickle, 2000), while recognising that teaching is inherently difficult for experts and novices alike (Cochran-Smith & Paris, 1995).

Acknowledgement of context in providing for new teacher learning is essential, most particularly where the type of school environment in which the beginning teacher takes up his or her first position is outside their prior experience. As such, beginning teachers need to be facilitated to come to

know the school and community in which they work. Gilbert (2005) argues that opportunities for them to work with experienced practitioners in the new teacher's own classroom are particularly powerful as they cultivate systematic inquiry into classroom practice. This however, as Wilson and Berne (1999) advocate, must be accompanied by an open and collegial school culture in which both informal mentoring and structured opportunities to foster collegial relations and professional dialogue are fostered. As such, the provision of support for newly qualified teachers must not be confined solely to designated mentors but be judged to be the shared responsibility of all teachers.

Beginning teacher learning is also effectively realised through the adoption of a partnership approach between schools, education centres, colleges of education and universities, teacher unions and government departments. The adoption of a cross-organisation approach provides for the building of a more authentic bridge between the learning gleaned in pre-service programmes and the realities to be addressed in the specific teaching contexts now occupied (Department of Education and Science, 2002; OECD, 2005). As Darling-Hammond (1998) asserts, "The rub between theory and practice occurs most productively when questions arise in the context of real students and work in progress, and where research and disciplined inquiry are also at hand" (p. 8).

2.4.1 The Role of Mentoring

The mainstay of most induction programmes is some form of mentoring, although the role of mentor is complex, vague and frequently ill-defined (Jones, 2001). Traditionally, mentoring approaches focused more specifically on achieving situational adjustment and the provision of technical advice and emotional support. Feiman-Nemser and Parker (1993) suggest that mentors judged themselves as being 'local guides' or 'educational companions', with only a minority fulfilling their role as 'agents of change'. Typically, they were seen as serving a variety of interrelated roles: organisational guide, cultural interpreter, broker of opportunities to learn and especially, supportive friend (Bullough, Young, & Draper, 2004). However, as Sprinthall, Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall (1996) conclude, support alone has proven not to be a sufficient condition to assure new teacher development.

In pursuit of the transformative capacity of mentoring, Feiman-Nemser (2001a) has coined the term 'educative mentoring' which embodies attendance to new teachers' present concerns, questions and purposes without losing sight of the long-term goals of teacher development. She recommends that mentors occupy the role of 'cothinker' rather than 'expert'. This involves them in assisting mentees to pinpoint the problems they are experiencing, to talk about teaching in precise and analytic ways, and to make meaningful connections between previously learned theory and current practice. In adopting this approach, the mentor strives to balance the

urge to share what he or she knows about good teaching with his or her responsibility to help the new teacher figure out what works for them as they build their professional practice.

Demonstration of teaching by the mentor of other experienced practitioners is a regular feature of mentoring. While apprenticeship-type learning opportunities have received much criticism for their perceived emphasis on promoting replication, Collins, Brown and Newman (1989) advocate a cognitive apprenticeship approach. When applied to the mentor-mentee relationship, cognitive apprenticeship involves the experienced teacher highlighting and discussing what they intended to be central to their demonstration as well as discovering through dialogue what the new teacher interpreted from what they observed. In many mentoring initiatives, novices are also regularly observed by their mentors. Adequate feedback on performance (Moran, Dallat, & Abbott, 1999) which incorporates the perspectives of the novice (Burn, Hagger, Mutton, & Everton, 2000), which balances support and development (Tickle, 2000), and which includes both positive reinforcement and the sensitive and decisive confronting of problem areas (Cains & Brown, 1998) is deemed to be critical.

The literature would suggest that mentoring in schools in designated areas of socio-economic disadvantage provides its own unique set of requirements. Guyton and Hidalgo (1995) describe the role of the mentor in

the US urban environment as being unique. They suggest that the mentor must take on particular facets of Wang and Odell's (2007) critical constructivist mentoring relationship, in that he or she must serve as a change agent, while also being an efficacious teacher, a collaborator and a pedagogue with diverse cultural perspectives. The need for urban mentors to be outstanding teachers is similarly stressed by Haberman (1994) who proposes that beginning teachers grow professionally by being associated with 'star' teachers, teacher leaders who can do "gentle teaching in a violent society" (p. 3).

Judicious attention to the careful selection and training of mentors is deemed to be crucial. Mentors need to be able to enact a vision of excellent teaching (Bartell, 2005), know how to support new teachers' learning, possess a deep-rooted capacity to provide critical guidance and constructive feedback (Evertson & Smithey, 2000; Kyle, Moore, & Sanders, 1999), provide the help necessary to establish the beginning teachers as competent professionals (OECD, 2005) and promote the potential for change (Pourdavood, Grob, Clark, & Orr, 1999). In so doing, the personal qualities of the mentor are of particular importance. Tickle (2000) identifies a broad range of desirable personal traits including accessibility, reliability, respect, honesty and humility, approachability and calmness of manner, supportive and encouraging, sensitive and empathetic, and humorous. In a recent Irish evaluation of beginning teachers' views of their relationship with their

assigned mentors (Killeavy & Murphy, 2005), the novices judged such relationships to be of value or very valuable to them. Unsurprisingly, while they considered the need for their mentor to be an experienced teacher as being desirable, all other significant qualities related to personal and interpersonal attributes such as the mentor's approachability and their capacity to listen and to empathise.

2.4.2 The Co-occurrence of Induction and Probation

In most education systems beginning teachers are initially appointed in a probationary capacity and they must be assessed as displaying satisfactory practice by the end of a designated period. This results in the induction period combining two potentially incompatible processes: the supportive process of induction and socialisation into the teaching profession in tandem with the judgemental process of monitoring and evaluation.

A review of the literature produces differing views of the appropriateness of this co-existence. For most writers (for example Britton, Raizen, Paine, & Huntley, 2000; Walsdorf & Lynn, 2002), the involvement of mentors in judgements affecting teachers' continued employment is seen to place an over-emphasis on evaluation rather than the provision of guidance in becoming a more skilled practitioner. They contend that this situation negatively impacts on novices' willingness to disclose the problems for which they need greatest assistance. Yet other writers (for example Feiman-

Nemser, 1996) suggest that those who are most directly involved in supporting new teachers are in the best position to validly evaluate their competence. This dichotomy is addressed in some jurisdictions through the adoption of a team approach in which the mentor fulfils the support function, while the evaluative function is completed by the principal or other designated member of senior management. A preference for the continued separation of the processes of induction and probation in the Irish context continues to be expressed by principals, mentors and teacher unions alike (INTO, 2008; Killeavy & Murphy, 2005).

It is also important to consider that the purpose of evaluation varies from one jurisdiction to another and that it can serve a much broader function than solely gate-keeping. In the APEC Teacher Induction Study (Moskowitz & Stephens, 1996), in instances where new teachers perceived the goal of assessment as being to support their development through skills' evaluation, induction programmes were perceived as non-threatening and generally supportive. As such, assessment operated in a formative sense and it was used to shape the development of the beginning teacher's professional competence and identity.

The education community has evidenced an international movement towards the use of formally articulated standards of professional practice, most recently in the Irish context (The Teaching Council, 2007). Many writers

judge the establishment of professional standards for induction and probation as being a means of helping new teachers craft a professional vision of ambitious teaching (Moir & Gless, 2001), while simultaneously assessing their progress towards these standards through the promotion of professional habits of inquiry and norms of accountability (Feiman-Nemser, 2003). But the standards' movement is not without its critics. Tickle (2000) argues that the most recent developments in induction policy and practice in England emphasise the external definition of teaching behaviours which are in turn summatively assessed by school management and inspectors. He argues that this process communicates that external and expert referents for acceptable performance must be satisfied by beginning teachers.

In reflecting on the experience of the introduction of induction standards in Scotland, McNally and Gray (2006) suggest that standards can be too general and that the language they contain may not capture the essence of classroom teaching for beginners. As such, their relative use to new teachers to shape conversations about teaching can be limited while their perceived primary function as a statement of formal assessment and public accountability persists. As such, these contemporary manifestations of induction run the risk of contributing to new teacher anxiety and vulnerability (Bullough & Draper, 2004), while simultaneously discouraging them from becoming self-monitoring or reflective practitioners (Dymoke & Harrison, 2006).

In contrast, Bartell (2005) advocates for what she terms capacity-enhancing standards which, while reflecting what is already known about good teaching from both research and best practice, would also be open to interpretation within individual school settings as teachers "test them out, refine, extend, and give meaning to them in the context of practice" (p. 120). It is intended that this school-based mediation would not result in the standardisation of beginning teachers' practice through the imposition of externally mandated benchmarks. In contrast, it is seen as a means of empowering and facilitating the building of capacity as new teachers and mentors ascertain together the best ways in which to meet the expectations of performance, with this working-through process being educative in itself through stimulating inquiry into practice (Darling-Hammond, 1997).

Within the Irish context, the probation of newly qualified teachers continues to be conducted by the Department of Education and Science's Inspectorate (Department of Education and Science, 2005b, 2006) using inspectorate-devised evaluation criteria. Inspectors visit newly qualified teachers at various intervals during the probationary period to monitor their progress, to provide advice and guidance, and to report on their performance in teaching the range of curriculum areas appropriate to the teaching setting. The successful completion of the probation process is an essential element in the professional recognition of beginning teachers and in their achievement of full recognition to teach in Irish primary schools.

2.5 Beginning Teachers' Professional Learning

Learning to teach is a complex, idiosyncratic and transformative process. Schön (1987) argues that it is paradoxical in nature in that new teachers do not fully understand what they must learn, they can only learn by educating themselves through self-discovery, and they can only educate themselves by beginning to do what they do not yet fully understand. The first year of teaching is characterised by a movement from relative innocence about teaching and what it means to be a teacher to a position of increasing sophistication. At the outset of the first year, the new teacher is filled with endless questions, about pupils, about what to teach and how to teach it, about how to establish relationships and manage the classroom effectively, about colleagues, parents and community. As Feiman-Nemser (2003) suggests, it is these unending questions that represent a major learning agenda for the novice, embracing issues of curriculum, instruction, assessment, management, school culture and the larger community.

2.5.1 Learning About Pupils

New teachers' capacity to come to know the pupils in their first official classroom is a crucially important determinant of their success as a teacher (Manuel & Hughes, 2006). In learning about their pupils, Feiman-Nemser (2001b) stresses the importance of novices coming to understand who they are as persons in their own right and the combination of knowledge, interest and life experiences they bring to school. Getting to know pupils however is

a gradual process. For the new teacher, recollections of themselves as young persons, knowledge acquired through siblings, and experiences of teaching practice are steadily overtaken by familiarity with pupils as gleaned through direct experiences with them in the full-time classroom context. However as Berliner (1986) argues, newly appointed teachers, unlike their more experienced colleagues, do not at this point possess a fully fleshed image of the multidimensional nature of young learners and their attendant learning strengths, interests and challenges. Instead they come to know individual pupils from whom they in turn make emerging generalisations.

Csikszentmihalyi and Larson (1984) stress that newly qualified teachers must use their knowledge of pupils as a means of realising a key challenge of instruction, namely the generation of pupils' interest, motivation and focused attention. In striving to establish a constructive classroom environment and positive relationships with their pupils, they must simultaneously foster their enthusiasm for and engagement in learning. In a similar vein, Intrator (2003) asserts that relationship building must co-exist with a utilisation of beginning teachers' expertise in curriculum and pedagogy to continually seek points of intersection between subject matter and pupils' own interests. In order to achieve this goal, novices must take time to talk and listen to their pupils, both in the context of formal instruction and informally throughout the school day. Wildman et al. (1989) stress the importance of them coming to know pupils' families, the communities within

which they live and the aspects of culture that are dear to them. Engagement in this process allows them, with increasing time and experience, to productively use this understanding when confronting the demands of planning for their classes (Bullough et al., 1991).

Commencing one's teaching career in an area of socio-economic disadvantage provides its own unique learning opportunities. An ever widening social and cultural disparity exists between new teachers and the pupils they teach in such communities (for example Sleeter, 2001; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). It is widely accepted that this cultural mismatch can be a source of significant distress for beginning teachers (Bullough et al., 2004; Cains & Brown, 1998; Huberman, 1993). However, as Achinstein and Barrett (2004) argue, such beginning teacher concerns may have less to do with the reality of such communities and be more attributable to their perceptions of diversity as being problematic and their negative characterisations of pupils from such areas. New teachers' negative assumptions about such diverse learners, including what King (1991) terms their 'dysconscious' assumptions, coupled with their lack of confidence in their ability to teach such pupils can produce lowered expectations and limited practices (Guskey, 1995; Metz, 1990; Stoddard, 1993).

The introduction of ethnic, racial and linguistic diversity into the socio-economically less-advantaged mix is a relatively new phenomenon in

Ireland. Novices who begin their teaching careers in such communities have the added obligation of learning about and coming to appreciate the diversity of family backgrounds, communities, cultures and experiences that their pupils bring to school. If this responsibility is to be effectively realised, Feiman-Nemser (2001a) argues that the provision of opportunities for new teachers to explore their overt and hidden biases, as well as their personal and prior experiences of diversity, is a critical element of the process of learning about pupils.

2.5.2 Getting to Know the School Context

Getting to know the school context is simultaneously an invigorating and daunting learning experience. Aspects of school context that become immediately pertinent to new teachers include school-specific curriculum planning, organisational policies and procedures, approaches to assessment and reporting, provision for pupils with additional learning needs, and the availability of materials and resources (Killeavy & Murphy, 2005; Veenman, 1984). While information packs and one-off orientation sessions are becoming the norm, much of what beginning teachers need to know and understand can only be acquired through the adoption of a developmental approach to supporting their professional learning.

Getting to know the school context must quickly extend beyond the new teachers' most immediate concerns of roll books and yard-duty procedures

and come to include an acquisition of understanding of the expected goals and outcomes for the pupils they teach and how these expectations fit into the larger school curriculum and pupil achievement nationally. Feiman-Nemser (2001b) stresses the need for beginning teachers to learn how to interpret and subsequently use this information in their class-based planning and instruction. In striving to achieve whole-school learning goals for their pupils, novices must also come to understand and work collaboratively with the range of support teaching personnel employed in their schools.

2.5.3 The Challenge of Planning and Preparation

Planning and organising a programme of work for the first time demands an enormous amount of beginning teachers' time and commitment. Bullough, Knowles and Crow (1991) describe the process of planning as being a simultaneously enervating yet exhilarating experience. Much of this enervation stems from new teachers' attempts to make sense of the requirements for long-term and short-term planning, to plan for the diversity of pupils' needs, and to prepare stimulating resources (Department of Education and Science, 2005b, 2006).

Planning and preparation for the novice involves significantly more than simply linking curriculum requirements to instructional activities. As Clark (1988) argues, it revolves around their interpretation and transformation of knowledge, their formulation of intentions, and their subsequent actioning of

both knowledge and intentions. Integral to this process is their understanding of the curriculum and their knowledge of their pupils (Feiman-Nemser, 2001b). Planning therefore extends beyond the technician's perspective of teaching to one that is significantly more complex, unpredictable and cognitively demanding. Clark (1988) further contends that for beginning teachers, a great deal of their planning and preparation energy goes into the anticipation of potential problems, the consideration of what pupils may already know and how they might respond, and the formulation of plans and routines that are robust in the context of the ongoing interruptions and distractions that are an innate element of their school environments.

For new teachers in the Irish context, the purpose of planning and preparation extends beyond the immediate demands of their interactions with their assigned pupils. It is judged by them to be a core requirement in serving and concluding a satisfactory probationary period (Department of Education and Science Inspectorate, 2005). In their study of newly qualified primary teachers' needs in the Irish context, Killeavy and Murphy (2005) discovered that their primary need centred on planning and preparation for their classroom teaching, a practice viewed by them as being of major importance in securing fully qualified status.

Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002) further contend that new teachers expend significant energies on inventing creative learning activities and developing

stimulating teaching materials as a means of becoming visible as competent, creative and hardworking professionals in their schools. For the novices, this visibility serves as a strategy to advertise their professional competence both within the immediate confines of the classroom, but also more broadly in the wider school environment.

2.5.4 Making Teaching and Learning Happen

Traditionally, beginning teachers have been accused of being preoccupied with their capacity to manage the breadth of classroom activities effectively and to be seen to do so by significant others (Athanases & Achinstein, 2003). Their greater emphasis on their own performance, most especially at the outset of their first year of teaching, was seen to provide lesser space for affording attention to pupils' performance and achievement. Working through a variety of personal and procedural concerns was seen as being a prerequisite for devoting attention to the effects of teaching (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007; Good & Brophy, 2000).

However, more recent studies of beginning teacher development would argue that novices take pupils' learning seriously from the outset of their careers (for example Bullough et al., 2004; Burn et al., 2000; Watzke, 2007). They further contend that novices use this commitment as a driver for the enactment of ambitious pedagogies learned in initial teacher education, rather than reverting to safer, less complex activities in the face of the

multiple challenges being experienced. Ball and Cohen (1999) assert that as new teachers, they have to quickly develop the capacity to apply pre-service learning in context, to think on their feet, to size up situations and decide what to do, to study the effects of their practice, and to use what they have learned to inform future planning and teaching.

Primary teachers, in contrast to their post-primary colleagues, are seen as masters of knowledge across a wide range of curriculum subjects. For this image to translate into practice, new teachers need to develop a deep understanding of curriculum content in each of the subject areas (Government of Ireland, 1999). But more importantly as Darling-Hammond and Baratz-Snowden (2007) argue, they must possess a rich, coherent, conceptual map of the curriculum; an appreciation of why the individual subjects are important and come together to form a coherent whole; and an awareness of how to communicate knowledge and understanding to those in their care.

At the outset of the first year in teaching, trial-and-error approaches to teaching predominate. Tickle (1994) describes such approaches as involving "creative strategies" and "mental agility...in the face of inherent instability and unpredictability in situations", a matter of "playing it by ear and playing the hunch" (p. 137). Engagement in experimentation allows beginning teachers to hone their teaching skills by reflecting on their successes and

analysing their failures (Renard, 2003). As Intrator (2006) confirms, success brings with it a range of positive and thrilling emotions for the beginning teacher, when a lesson goes well, or when they discern a breakthrough on the part of the class or an individual pupil. But learning to teach also involves repeated failures. When lessons do not materialise as planned, negative and discomforting emotions quickly emerge (Ria, Sève, Saury, Theureau, & Durand, 2003). Despite their susceptibility to this emotional pendulum, a lack of willingness on the beginning teacher's part to take risks may hinder their development and unnecessarily restrict pupils' learning opportunities (Bullough et al., 1991). On the other hand as Huberman (1993) argues, engagement in a continual process of trial and error can cultivate feelings of inadequacy and inconsistency in the new teacher, and of being ill-qualified to take on the task of teaching. It can also provide them with survival strategies on which they may come to depend in the longer term, whether or not they represent best practice.

As the first year in teaching progresses, and as novices gain in knowledge and experience, they rely less on trial-and-error approaches and they demonstrate more complex and intricate pedagogical problem-solving strategies (Kagan, 1992). Bullough, Young and Draper (2004) describe this shift as being a movement towards "informed tinkering, a form of thoughtful experimentation" (p. 372). As such, the new teacher's concern with pupils' learning provides both focus and direction for the manner in which they

attempt to frame and resolve problems, even though they still might not be fully sure as to what they ought to do.

Providing for mixed-ability teaching is frequently found to be a particularly stress-provoking aspect of the role (for example Bezzina, 2006; Cains & Brown, 1998; Killeavy & Murphy, 2005). Gash (2006), in his study of beginning Irish primary teachers, found that they experienced particular challenges in relation to the provision of differentiated programmes of learning. Yet in attending to pupils' learning, novices are daily confronted with the need to develop the skills to know what to do if pupils are experiencing difficulties and to adjust their teaching if pupils do not learn (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007). Novices' engagement in analysing learning and relating it to teaching are critical in helping them to focus on learning and how to support it, and in developing their repertoire of teaching strategies.

Designing responsive instruction however is not limited to solitary teacher reflection in pre- and post-instruction periods. As Feiman-Nemser (2001b) proposes, beginning teachers must learn on their feet how to elicit and interpret pupils' thoughts, views and ideas and in turn to generate appropriate pedagogical moves as the lesson unfolds. This development of understanding and the construction of appropriate responses on a moment-to-moment basis present particular challenges for new teachers. This

capacity is inherently bound up in novices' capacity to form connections with their pupils and to be especially sensitive to miniscule shifts in levels of interest, engagement and understanding.

2.5.5 Learning to Manage the Classroom Effectively

Classroom management is frequently cited as being one of the most crucial areas of learning for beginning teachers (for example Bezzina, 2006; Kagan, 1992; Killeavy, 2001; Killeavy & Murphy, 2005; Veenman, 1984). Its criticality, as Grossman (1992) advocates, is based on the premise that the manner in which beginning teachers manage classrooms facilitates or constrains the possibilities of teaching, classroom discourse and ultimately pupils' learning. Classroom management however is not simply the implementation of effective procedures. It is, as Garrahy et al. (2005) propose, a complex decision-making process, the development of which is significantly influenced by personal and contextual forces.

Difficulties with classroom management may emanate from the struggle of newly appointed teachers to establish a positive learning environment and to collaboratively agree and communicate appropriate expectations regarding pupil behaviour and engagement. For the beginning teacher, the first encounter with pupils brings with it the challenge of assuming an appropriate yet comfortable role resulting sometimes, as Huberman (1993) asserts, in them being too strict or too lax or vacillating uneasily between the two. This

situation can be further exacerbated by their misanalysis of the nature of pupils' intentions and interactions. As they have not had the opportunity to develop the breadth of experience and expertise of their more veteran colleagues there can be, as Needels (1991) purports, a tendency to misinterpret classroom events and to react excessively to relatively minor indiscretions.

Alternatively, struggles with classroom management may have to do with issues of problem construction, in which new teachers misinterpret their early lack of capacity to effectively design and implement engaging learning encounters for pupils as being a display of indiscipline on the pupils' part. Feiman-Nemser (2001b) argues that in contexts where novices experience classroom management challenges, they can be attributable to them attempting to apply underdeveloped conceptions of teaching and unelaborated schemas of pupils, as their understanding of and ability to react effectively to the connections between instruction and management are substantially less developed than their more experienced colleagues (Martin, 2004). In their study of early-career teachers over a two-year period, Flores and Day (2006) concluded that such representations regularly produced defensive and custodial management practices that ultimately transpired as being outmoded and ill-fitting.

This situation may be further intensified when working in a school environment in which a reduced academic motivation and interest co-exists with a tendency to misbehave. Schempp et al. (1993) contend that in response to the interplay of these factors, the beginning teacher's first order of business and primary classroom responsibility becomes that of classroom management, as they strive to implement procedures for managing pupils and establishing themselves as authority figures. Commencing one's teaching career in such environments can result in new teachers teaching defensively, lowering expectations and simplifying content in their goal to maintain and be seen to maintain classroom order (Achinstein & Barrett, 2004; Vonk & Schras, 1987).

The challenge for beginning teachers is therefore to create a classroom learning environment that is safe, respectful, and productive of pupil learning. Feiman-Nemser (2001b) advocates that this should include the establishment of an appropriate physical environment, the creation of rules and routines, the promotion of cooperation, problem solving and democratic working among pupils, as well as dealing effectively with disagreements. While beginning teachers appear to experience significantly lesser difficulties with the organisational and procedural aspects of classroom management, Martin (2004) contends that establishing and maintaining social interactions both with and among pupils that foster learning is significantly more challenging.

Central to these tasks are issues of power and control. Achinstein and Barrett (2004) argue that novices require multiple ways of framing in order to understand the complexity of issues that arise, to identify their underlying values and to make decisions in order that the situations may be effectively resolved. They suggest that through learning to reframe, the new teacher develops the capacity to consider the underlying cause of the pupil's action or behaviour and to respond appropriately rather than punitively. In support of this contention, Stroiber (1991) notes that the adoption of more reflective approaches to classroom management empowers beginning teachers to create more positive learning environments while simultaneously enhancing their problem-solving capacities.

2.5.6 Developing the Capacity to be Reflective

The concept of reflection originates in the work of Dewey (1933) in which he asserted that engagement in reflective thinking is imperative as it serves to convert "action that is merely appetitive, blind and impulsive into intelligent action" (p. 17). More contemporary conceptions of reflective practice stem from the work of Schön (1983, 1987). In advocating the development of reflective practice as a central tenet of professional education, he suggests that practitioners who are reflective develop the "forms of inquiry by which competent practitioners reason their way, in problematic instances, to clear connections between general knowledge and particular cases" (Schön, 1987, p. 22).

As such, reflective teachers continually scrutinise their practice and possess the capacity to verbalise the underlying reasons for discrete decisions and choices. They continually analyse pupils' engagement and their collective and individual progress as they in turn modify their teaching approaches in response to their findings. For the beginning teacher, opportunities for engagement in reflective teaching may be constrained by the perceived pressures of full-time teaching and demands for expediency. Yet, it is a significantly important area of new teachers' learning if the establishment of routine and formulaic teaching is to be avoided and their practice is to be used as a site for inquiry.

Bartell (2005) argues that engagement in reflection by early-career teachers is more likely to transpire if it is fostered in the context of a formal induction programme and a culture of collegial reflection. She contends that for reflection to occur effectively, it requires time, guidance and support. In upholding this perspective, Feiman-Nemser (2001b) advocates that new teachers learn to turn confusions into questions, to try out new initiatives and to analyse their impacts, to frame new questions and to extend their understanding. This, she suggests, requires them to develop the capacity to observe and analyse, in tandem with the dispositions to seek evidence, to take risks and to remain open to differing interpretations.

In engaging in the reflective process, it is deemed imperative that new teachers are provided with opportunities to engage in dialogue with experienced colleagues about their emerging practices, attitudes, beliefs and understandings. Ross (1992) argues that solitary reflection brings with it inherent dangers for novices. He contends that as newcomers to the profession, individually instituted reflection can cause early-career teachers to focus primarily inward to where knowledge and understanding are still evolving. This may result in reflection that is overtly narrow and individualistic and through which biases, stereotypes, false assumptions or inaccuracies are validated (Bartell, 2005). Having the opportunity to engage with skilled colleagues who will assist beginning teachers to pose the pertinent questions and to extend beyond the obvious is critical. Achinstein and Barrett (2004) suggest that mentors can play a significant role in assisting novices to reframe and understand their problems, bringing with them a myriad of diagnoses and remedies from their more expert schemata. In this context, the veteran's capacity to encourage and facilitate the new teacher to introduce his or her own themes for and ways of reflecting into the reflection mix are of equal importance.

2.6 The Development of Beginning Teachers' Professional Identity

Giddens (1991) uses the term self-identity to mean "the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography" (p. 53). The professional self, as a facet of self-identity, holds a prominent place in

beginning teachers' personal interpretative framework (Kelchtermans, 1993). Sumara and Luce-Kapler (1996) assert that becoming a teacher involves more than transposing teaching skills onto an already established personal identity. It is more akin, as McNally and Gray (2006) argue, to the assumption or adoption of a new identity. Ultimately, becoming a teacher means including the identity of 'teacher' in one's life. For novice teachers, the beliefs and values about what it means to be a teacher and the type of teacher they aspire to become are strongly influential in this process (Sachs, 2001). So too, as Bullough (1997) concludes, are the previous life and learning experiences they bring to their initial teaching positions.

For new teachers, identity is inherently interwoven with context. Their identity is not solely confined to the emergence of internal traits and dispositions but it emerges through their involvement with others in cultural practice (Smagorinsky, Cook, Moore, Jackson, & Fry, 2004). This process of professional identity formation is frequently highly emotionally charged. As novices, they must face the fundamental question of whether they see themselves as teachers in what is reflected from pupils, colleagues, management, parents and inspectors alike, as well as from the myriad of interactions engaged in. As Featherstone (1993) contends, "the new teacher is constantly on stage and urgently needs to develop a performing self with whom he or she can live comfortably" (p. 26).

For newly appointed teachers, identity is neither fixed nor static. It is an ongoing and dynamic process embodying a high degree of sense-making and interpretation. Lasky (2005) suggests that its formation in the early years of teaching is critical due to the intrinsic relationship between professional identity and how beginning teachers define themselves to themselves and to others. Equally importantly as Ball and Goodson (1985) assert, is the manner in which professional identity contributes to teachers' self-efficacy, motivation and job satisfaction and its significance in understanding their actions and commitment in their work.

2.6.1 The Influence of a Beginning Teacher's Own Schooling

Beginning teachers' images of teaching and of themselves as teachers spring from a wide variety of sources, with the influence of those emanating from personal biography considered to be particularly strong (Hargreaves & Jacka, 1995; Tabachnik & Zeichner, 1984). Bullough et al. (1991) argue that beginning teachers enter their pre-service programmes of education with partial, but often firmly held, conceptions of themselves as teachers and a teaching schema which has been developed over years of life experience, most particularly through their 'apprenticeship of observation' (Lortie, 1975). Thus novices' prior experiences as pupils are seen to play a significant role in mediating the pre-service experience.

Knowles (1992) asserts that the positive or negative models of teaching as provided by former teachers continue to serve an important socialising function on entering the teaching profession. He suggests that images of teaching, learning pupils and subject matter formed during primary and post-primary schooling provide beginning teachers with a basis for interpreting and assessing ideas and practices encountered during their first years of teaching. However, such personally held images and beliefs are not without their drawbacks and limitations. They can equally serve as barriers to change and development by limiting the ideas and images that new teachers are able and prepared to entertain. In reflecting on their inhibiting capabilities, Feiman-Nemser (2001b) contends that they may mislead new teachers into thinking that they know more about teaching than they actually do and in turn may make it more difficult for them to form new ideas and new habits of thought and action.

2.6.2 The Impact of Pre-service Education

In comparison to the strongly influential role of personal biography, both Hargreaves and Jacka (1995) and Flores and Day (2006) assert that new teachers' images of teaching and of themselves as teachers are relatively weakly formed by their pre-service education experience. This may be due to the perceived inability of initial teacher education programmes to realise cognitive dissonance and the concomitant mitigation of pre-existing images

of self-as-teacher (Kagan, 1992), as well as the overly skills-oriented nature of many pre-service programmes, as considered in Section 2.2.

Kagan (1992) suggests that prospective teachers' pre-existing beliefs and images and their prior experience play a critical role in filtering the content of education courses. In her review of forty learning-to-teach studies, she found that each study testified to the stability and inflexibility of prior beliefs and images and pointed to the important role played by the novice's image of self-as-teacher. In a development of the influence of personally held meanings, Bullough et al. (1991) contend that in responding selectively to the content and activities offered to them at pre-service level, novices' aim is to seek confirmation of what they already believe to be true.

While it is universally accepted that learning to teach demands that new teachers come to understand teaching in ways that are quite different from what they learned from their own experiences of schooling, Darling Hammond and Baratz-Snowden (2007) argue that prospective teachers' views of teaching frequently afford greater attention to issues of personality rather than to pedagogical knowledge and subject matter. In pursuit of this contention, McNally and Gray (2006) attribute the foregrounding of the emotional and relational dimensions of teaching and the backgrounding of the cognitive dimensions to an underdeveloped conception of self-as-teacher

among pre-service teachers and a resolutely held image of teaching as merely transmitting information and enthusiastically engaging pupils.

In their detailed investigation of the formation of teacher identity, Bullough et al. (1991) further argue that for novices who enter teacher education lacking a reasonably clear conception of themselves as teachers, their pre-service programmes at best provide the opportunity to explore the appropriateness of a few alternative visions of teaching, but only in a most superficial sense. On the other hand, for those who leave pre-service education and are still striving to find themselves as teachers, they conclude that they are likely to be left extremely vulnerable to the contextual pressures of teaching.

2.6.3 Beginning Teachers' Evolving Conceptions of Self-as-Teacher

Beginning teachers enter their first year of teaching with strongly held but not rigid, taken for granted but not fully articulated, conceptions of themselves as teachers (Bullough et al., 1991). For many of them, the images they hold prior to taking up their first teaching positions display a high level of confidence in their capacity to realise these personally held conceptions in their pending daily practices. However as Weinstein (1988) concludes, new teachers are regularly overly optimistic in their expectations of themselves as teachers and of their pupils.

Once in the classroom, Kagan (1992) argues that beginning teachers seek to confirm and validate their self-images. In so doing, many novices quickly encounter difficulties of varying intensity that challenge their existing conceptions of teaching and of themselves as teachers. In supportive school environments, they can be aided to use their growing knowledge of pupils and classrooms to effectively, modify, adapt and reconstruct their images of self-as-teacher. In contrast, where challenges to beginning teachers' sense-of-self are unrelenting, a period of transition shock as characterised by Fuller (1969, 1975) in his 'survival stage' of learning to teach may be entered. In such contexts, beginning teachers usually respond initially by holding more resolutely to their conceptions of themselves as teachers, shoring up their teaching schemas by a variety of means (Bullough et al., 1991) or by moving, as Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002) suggest, to protect their professional integrity and identity through the advancement of self-interests.

At the outset of their careers, new teachers often battle to reconcile competing images of themselves as teachers. In particular, as Feiman-Nemser (2001b) proposes, they struggle with their need to be an authority in the areas of discipline and classroom management with their desire to be perceived as a friendly person, their need to prepare pupils for the real world with their desire to be a nurturing caregiver who is responsive to individual differences. These dichotomies rang through particularly loudly for the participants who partook in the Flores and Day (2006) study of Portuguese

beginning teachers. In describing the teacher's role and good teaching, issues of flexibility, care, variety in teaching methodologies and responsiveness to pupils' learning needs were to the fore in the novices' accounts. However, in practice these same new teachers reported teaching against their initial ideal beliefs in response to classroom management demands.

In the case of most beginning teachers, changes in their conceptions of themselves as teachers and of teaching occur over time and are generally accompanied by an evolution of self-understanding, improvements in professional practice and greater levels of job satisfaction. However, as Bullough et al. (2004) argue, the actualisation of one's preferred image of self-as-teacher is dependent on the beginning teacher's ability to improve specific teaching skills and capacities. While recognising the value of possessing a strong sense of self-as-teacher from the outset of one's career, they simultaneously acknowledge that where professional identity and accompanying teaching schemata prove to be overtly resistant to change, the outcome for the individual beginning teacher may be one of thwarted development and growing ineptitude.

2.6.4 Socialisation Into the Context of the School

The context within which a beginning teacher finds him or herself teaching is a critical contributor to the formation and reformation of professional identity.

As Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002) propose, organisational socialisation is not simply a passive sliding into an existing context, but rather it is an interpretative and interactive process between the new teacher and the context. In the course of this interactive process, the new teacher is influenced by the context while also in turn affecting the structures in which he or she is socialised (Zeichner & Gore, 1990). Jordell (1987) suggests that school-based structural features, such as the ecology of the classroom and school norms and regulations, serve as significant influencing factors.

Hargreaves and Jacka (1995) are highly critical of the impact of pre-service education on beginning teacher socialisation. They argue that initial teacher education is ultimately a process of seduction into images and practices of teaching that prepare new teachers neither to adjust to the unchanged realities of schools, nor to develop the intellectual understanding and political skills which would enable them to challenge those realities. In a similar vein, Rust (1994) argues that beginning teachers at the outset of their careers can be significantly disadvantaged by their lack of awareness of the micro-political contexts of their new schools and this in turn can leave them vulnerable or ill-equipped to "deal with the problems and difficulties they encounter...and challenge the pressures to conform" (Kuzmic, 1994, p. 24). This inexperience is frequently coupled with a desire by them to fit into their schools and to be recognised as contributing members of their school community. This simultaneous desire to fit in while maintaining their

individuality can, as Blase (1988) asserts, require unhappy compromises in playing the game and ensuring survival at work.

2.6.5 The Role of School Culture

Day (1999) defines culture as being about "people in the organisational setting, characterised by the ways in which values, beliefs, prejudices and behaviour are played out within the micro-political processes of school life" (p. 78). As such, the induction of newly qualified teachers involves their socialisation into existing school cultures and structures, and how and what they learn grows out of that context (Wang & Schulle, 2008). The context of their newly acquired schools serves to shape their views of themselves as teachers, of teaching and of the profession in an authentic and enduring way.

Schempp et al. (1993) provide a very useful insight into the micro-politics of teacher induction. They argue that initiates adopt ways of thinking and acting that place them in harmony with the existing occupational culture, as they respond appropriately to the cultural codes communicated to them by principals, colleagues and pupils. Acceptance of the inductee by his or her new colleagues depends on the extent to which they are viewed as a positive addition to the existing establishment. New teachers evolve as they become fuller members of the organisation and the organisation in turn develops in response to the newly introduced perspectives and practices

brought by the new teacher. Increasing value is given to the opinions and services of the novice as his or her status becomes more defined and significant. As well as coming to appreciate the power hierarchy that operates within the school and the differing power positions that are occupied, they assert that beginning teachers themselves must also strive to acquire their own social power if they are to function effectively on a daily basis and to gain longer term acceptance.

However, the process of assimilation as proposed by Schempp et al. (1993) cannot be presumed to be straightforward and uncomplicated. Tickle (2000) suggests that, for some beginning teachers, organisational socialisation can result in a clash with their professional identities, ideals and ambitions. Day (1999) characterises such entry into the profession as being a two-way struggle in which newly qualified teachers strive to construct their own social reality by endeavouring to create harmony between their personally held vision and the life lived in their classroom, while at the same time being subjected to the powerful socialising forces of school culture. The impact of this two-way struggle results in the materialisation of diverse outcomes.

Bartell (2005) suggests that, for many beginning teachers, this constant tussle results in them ultimately taking on the beliefs and practices of their colleagues, even if they are at odds with what they believe and have learned during initial teacher education. In the case of other early-career teachers,

Schempp et al. (1993) contend that such teachers join the "society of the silent" (p. 468) in an attempt to maintain their uniqueness while also avoiding violating the explicit and implicit cultural norms of the school. However, organisational socialisation does not inevitably result in unhappy compromises for all new teachers. Flores and Day (2006) conclude that those who enter the profession with well-developed professional identities that are underpinned by powerful intrinsic motivations are much less likely to succumb to conservative and regressive institutional norms.

The manifestation of teacher cultures and the manner in which they support new teacher induction are also particularly important to this inquiry. Hargreaves (1994) portrays collaborative teacher cultures, as opposed to the traditional approaches of individualism, as being spontaneous, voluntary, development-oriented and pervasive across time and space. Such cultures are consistently proven to be particularly beneficial in supporting the development of both professional identity and professional practice (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Moskowitz & Stephens, 1996; Nias, Southworth, & Yeomans, 1989; Williams et al., 2001). While they are highly desirable, it is widely accepted that collaborative teacher cultures are less in evidence than might be hoped. Instead what Hargreaves (1994) terms as 'contrived collegiality' or Williams, Prestage and Bedward (2001) have coined 'structural collaboration', which offer newly

qualified teachers structured opportunities for development and learning, are more the norm.

Despite their inherent limitations, Day (1999) suggests that such cultures of contrived collegiality or structural collaboration, as evidenced in the introduction of formal induction practices in many jurisdictions, may act as a bridging process towards the realisation of more collaborative cultures in the longer term. In many schools, such formal induction supports are also accompanied by frequent formal and informal interactions among experienced and novice colleagues. In such settings the new teachers experience both the formal components of induction as well as informal supportive collegiality. As a consequence, new teacher recipients of such induction and socialisation assistance are more likely to feel supported in their work, to report greater satisfaction, to contribute to the professional community in their schools and to remain for the longer term (Fulton et al., 2005; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003).

2.6.6 The Role of the Principal and Colleagues

It is universally accepted that the principal is a critical figure in ensuring the effectiveness or failure of the process of induction of newly qualified teachers (OECD, 2005; Tickle, 2000). It is they who can create a range of school-based conditions that effectively support the novice's entry into the profession and the school. Such conditions include the allocation of an

appropriate assignment and a manageable workload, the provision of sufficient resources with which to teach and the maintenance of a stable and orderly work environment (Hopkins, Beresford, & West, 1998; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). School leaders can also facilitate the setting up of school structures that enable new teachers, mentors and colleagues to work together effectively.

During their first year in teaching, beginning teachers invest heavily in the development of their professional self-confidence. Acknowledgement and recognition by principals and colleagues are an important source for new teachers' self-esteem (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). In acknowledging the importance of professional recognition, Inman and Marlow (2004) argue that principals should also tap into the potential of the new ideas and ways of working that the newly appointed teacher brings to the school through the structuring of fora that make possible the sharing of innovations. In a study of the challenges faced by beginning Irish primary teachers and the supports available to them (Department of Education and Science Inspectorate, 2005), almost all the new teachers rated the support given to them by their principal very positively. However, despite this overwhelmingly positive rating, the role of the principal is often seen to revolve primarily around addressing beginning teachers' organisational and management-related requirements rather than their broader personal and professional development needs (Killeavy & Murphy, 2005).

For many beginning teachers, a mentor may be formally assigned at the commencement of the first year of teaching. Experience would indicate that most novices move beyond sole reliance on their mentor as a source of knowledge about teaching and support as the year progresses (Bullough et al., 2004). As Eraut (2004) suggests, their participation in same-grade planning teams and the development of informal relationships with wider colleagues can beneficially come to the fore. These in turn can be readily converted into avenues of support, as new teachers productively use these relationships to their benefit in developing and acquiring professional skills and knowledge, in sharing concerns and in discussing pedagogical questions. In the study of early-career teachers undertaken by Oberski, Ford, Higgins and Fisher (1999), relationships with colleagues were also judged to be an important support mechanism through which the new teachers became more effective in establishing relationships with their pupils.

Within the Irish context, the aforementioned Department of Education and Science Inspectorate (2005) study found that beginning teachers reported high levels of satisfaction with the support they received from other teachers and judged such assistance as being most helpful in their induction. The significance of the relational dimension of induction was similarly echoed in the Boreham, Gray and Blake (2006) study of the job satisfaction experienced by newly qualified teachers in Scotland. Their findings

categorically confirm the importance of recognition by the school community of the beginning teacher's status as a teacher and the establishment of good working relationships.

In some schools however, a commitment to the promotion of individualism rather than collaboration persists. As Hargreaves (1994) notes, such cultures of privacy unwittingly protect struggling teachers as they receive minimal feedback on their value, worth and competence. This maintenance of isolation can lead to self-doubt and feelings of inadequacy (Gold, 1996) as the beginning teachers struggle to build the self-confidence needed to foster the development of their teacher identity and to promote their professional growth. In yet other schools, new teachers are deliberately left to their own devices as a consequence of their more experienced colleagues judging the survival of the first year of teaching as being a process of new teachers paying their dues and achieving what Renard (2003) terms, the 'badge of honour'. Even in schools in which individualism and stoicism are non-pervasive, new teachers can still experience feelings of isolation and loneliness as a result of friendships and social groups being already well established and them being unaware of the cultural norms and shared history of the school (Walsdorf & Lynn, 2002).

2.6.7 The Centrality of Relationships With Pupils

Teaching and learning at its core is about relationships and connections (Hopkins et al., 1998; Manuel & Hughes, 2006) as “teachers place the relationship with their pupils at the very core of their profession” (Clement & Vanderberghe, 2001, p. 95). Teacher-pupil interactions are intensive and emotional, occurring on a day-to-day, hour-to-hour basis and as Wilson and Demetriou (2006) contend, “these interactions can be a source of job satisfaction in the context of positive classroom environments or of great distress in difficult circumstances” (p. 14). Pupils have a powerful influence, both positive and negative, on shaping how new teachers conceive of themselves as teachers and on the level of satisfaction they derive from their professional experience (Churchill & Walkington, 2002).

McNally and Gray (2006) make the case that beginning teachers enter teaching with definite beliefs and expectations about the kind of relationships they want to develop with their pupils. However, Weinstein (1988) cautions against novices’ assumption that the establishment of close and caring relationships will be a relatively easy task and the degree to which the concepts of care, compassion, friendship and empathy sit comfortably with them. Her work clearly confirms that, on entering the classroom, many beginning teachers find the establishment of productive relationships to be significantly more challenging than they had anticipated. Many of them are acutely aware, as are their pupils, that their identity as ‘teacher’ is still rather

raw and relatively unsteady (Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 1996). As a consequence, Bullough et al. (2004) argue that they have to feel their way along as they try to connect with individual pupils and groups in an effort to establish warm and caring relationships from which to draw personal and professional satisfaction.

The extent to which positive relationships can be realised is constrained however by a variety of situational factors, most particularly concerns regarding the effectiveness of teaching, learning and classroom management. New teachers receive immediate and ongoing feedback from their pupils regarding their pedagogical abilities and management skills. While such feedback can be used to make adjustments to how teaching is approached and executed, disapproving feedback has the potential to negatively affect new teachers' professional images of themselves as they begin to doubt themselves and their instructional capabilities (Schempp et al., 1993). In exposing the interconnectedness of pedagogical and classroom management competencies, Feiman-Nemser (2001a) asserts that the experiencing of classroom management challenges may have more to do with curriculum and instruction, and new teachers' ability to engage diverse learners in meaningful and challenging tasks, than with discipline. In contexts in which persistent challenges to relationship building and classroom management are experienced, curriculum and instruction may in

turn come to be used in ways that solely maintain control but do not promote learning (Kagan, 1992), thus perpetuating the downward spiral.

Conflicts can be common as beginning teachers struggle with what it means to be a teacher (Beach & Pearson, 1998). Sikes, Measor and Woods (1985) suggest that where beginning teachers are successful in maintaining control and successfully resolving challenging situations, their identity as a competent teacher is strengthened both in the eyes of their pupils and their colleagues. However, in contexts in which new teachers lack the skills to develop an appropriate framework of behavioural rules and sanctions when transgressions occur, a tendency towards overpunishment for lower level indiscretions exists (Canter, 1993). As Olson and Osborne (1991) assert, such conflicts hold significant emotional consequences for the new teachers including disappointment and guilt and a reduction in idealism (Goldstein & Lake, 2000). Where novice teachers experience classroom management challenges accompanied by a perceived absence of motivation for learning on the pupils' part, Bullough et al (1991) argue that blame for disinterest and indiscipline is regularly afforded to home environment and family-oriented factors so as to minimise the negative impacts on their evolving professional identities. It may also lead to disillusionment and the anguish of compromise (Khamis, 2000) as readjustments in expectations are made to minimise conflict between expectations and reality.

2.6.8 The Impact of Parents

Many teachers enter the primary teaching profession without the necessary dispositions, skills and knowledge to promote partnerships with parents that support pupils in the achievement of their educational potential. In their study of Irish beginning primary teachers, Killeavy and Murphy (2005) found that it was an area of new teachers' practice for which they reported being particularly ill-prepared. Early-career teachers appear not to know what to expect from parents because of their lack of experience of engaging directly with them. This is strongly borne out in Melnick and Meister's (2008) recent study of beginning and experienced teachers' concerns. They found that the experienced teachers were more at ease and adept when dealing with parents. Their knowledge of the community, the pupil population, and other characteristics and nuances gave them confidence when dealing with parents, in contrast to their less experienced colleagues. For many newly qualified teachers, the prospect of meeting with individual or groups of parents for the first time induces a distinct sense of fear due primarily to the fact that it continues to be an "untested experience" for them (B. Wilson, Ireton, & Wood, 1997, p. 396).

Parents themselves can play an overt and direct role in the socialisation of early-career teachers. The novices' perceptions of how well they are performing as teachers can be significantly affected, either positively or negatively, by parental feedback and comment. Wildman et al. (1989)

suggest that "Parents can cause a beginner to feel good or extremely despondent about teaching" (p. 484). They can afford new teachers positive feelings of efficacy and accomplishment (Inman & Marlow, 2004) through the provision of acknowledgement of their efforts and achievements with their children. In contrast, encounters with parents can also serve as a significant source of vulnerability for new teachers, in particular where feedback from parents is less than positive or where practices in use by the teacher are being called into question.

A lack of contact with parents, which is generally more prevalent in areas of greater socio-economic disadvantage, can be a source of beginning teacher disillusionment. As Gold (1996) and Knopf and Swick (2007) contend, new teachers may construe a lack of parental engagement as a confirmation of the absence of parental concern and motivation. However this lack of parental involvement with the beginning teacher and with the school generally may be more a reflection of the gap between the teacher's and the family's economic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Ratcliff and Hunt (2009) argue that early-career teachers have little experience with, or knowledge of, the challenges disadvantaged and minority parents face when attempting to participate in their children's education. There is a tendency for teachers, both novice and veteran alike, to possess perceptions of parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds that are stereotypical in nature and

which, as demonstrated by Bakker, Denessen and Brus-Laeven (2007), can in turn adversely affect the academic achievement of primary school pupils.

Keyes (2002), in her exposition of differing parent-teacher partnerships, highlights the significance of how teachers and parents view and subsequently enact their roles. From the perspective of this inquiry, the assumption of discrete and boundaried roles by novice teachers can result in them failing to view parents as an opportunity for further enhancing their personal and professional learning as they come to understand and appreciate individual pupils in their fullest sense (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998). Novices can too readily fail to recognise or dismiss the contributions of parents due to their perspectives and priorities being at variance to those held dearly by the parents themselves.

2.7 Conclusion

The quality and effectiveness of pre-service programmes of education in preparing prospective teachers for the rigour and requirements of the primary teaching profession are subject to growing scrutiny. Such analysis has focused increasingly on their capacity to foster the competencies required by newly qualified teachers to perform effectively in the classroom. Both Irish and international studies confirm that new teachers emerge possessing appropriate proficiency in many areas of their professional practice. However other areas, most particularly classroom management,

mixed-ability teaching and special educational needs, are assessed as being insufficiently cultivated and transpire as matters with which many early-career teachers struggle in their first year of teaching.

The recruitment and retention of high-calibre teachers is also receiving significant public and policy attention in response to the evaluated negative impacts of high teacher turnover on school morale and on the learning outcomes achieved by pupils. While primary teaching in Ireland continues to enjoy high social status, primary schools located in areas of greater socio-economic disadvantage continue to experience higher levels of teacher attrition. A range of school-site factors has been widely proven to play a significantly influential role in early-career teachers' decisions to remain in such schools. Despite this internationally replicated finding, the provision of such desired working conditions continues to be variously recognised and responded to by school authorities.

The widespread provision of nationally structured and implemented programmes of induction to support the entry of new teachers into the primary teaching profession is a relatively new phenomenon. In Ireland, while a nationally coordinated induction initiative was introduced in 2002, it continues to be provided on a pilot basis in specific geographic regions only. Despite its continued curtailed implementation, it manifests many of the attributes and features of international induction programmes that have been

evaluated as being effective in supporting the development of beginning teachers' professional competence. Critical to the success of such programmes has been the assignment of a dedicated mentor. However, this move towards the implementation of highly structured induction initiatives, in which the role of designated mentors is deemed paramount, has resulted in many instances in the non-realisation of shared responsibility for induction among the wider teaching staff.

In most education systems, the process of induction co-exists with a period of probation during which evaluation criteria must be met by newly qualified teachers in order for them to achieve full recognition as primary teachers. In sharp contrast to most international jurisdictions, the formal evaluation of beginning teacher competence continues to be undertaken in Ireland by the Department of Education and Science's Inspectorate using inspectorate-devised evaluation criteria. While such standards are made available summarily to newly qualified teachers, they are not systematically utilised by them to inform and shape their professional practice. This is most likely due to a combination of the inadequate communication of the required standards on the part of the Inspectorate and the perceived irrelevance of externally mandated standards to the new teachers in the course of their daily work in classrooms.

Over the course of the first year in teaching, the development of professional practice presents a sizeable and distinct learning agenda for the beginning teacher. Chief among these requirements is the need to learn about their pupils and their newly acquired school context. The socio-economic, ethnic, racial and linguistic mix overtly present in primary schools in designated areas of socio-economic disadvantage can cause offence to some beginning teachers. It can simultaneously expose a thinly disguised veil of negative assumptions about learners in such communities and a lack of confidence in their self-assessed ability to respond to their diversity of needs. Engagement in the dual processes of planning and preparation is particularly demanding and for Irish newly qualified teachers is inherently perceived by them as being a prerequisite for the achievement of fully qualified status.

For most beginning teachers, progress through the first year in teaching exemplifies a significant shift from a dependence on trial-and-error teaching approaches to the use of more complex and intricate pedagogical problem solving. Despite this move, adequately providing for the diversity of learning needs present in the classroom proves to be consistently problematic for new teachers. Inextricably bound up in the design and implementation of a responsive curriculum is the beginning teacher's capacity to manage classroom activities and encounters effectively. Due to their relative lack of experience and expertise in these matters, the intrinsic connection between instruction and management may not be duly acknowledged and problem

behaviours as displayed by pupils may be misanalysed. In primary schools in which a tendency to misbehave co-exists with a reduced academic motivation, the maintenance of classroom order can become the early-career teacher's primary goal. The challenge to reflect on and in turn modify teaching practices and actions proves to be consistently taxing for new teachers. Demands for expediency coupled with an underdeveloped knowledge base on which to initiate their reflections can result in the avoidance or the affording of superficial attention to reflective practice.

In addition to the development of professional competence, the first year in teaching marks a major evolution in the novice's sense of self-as-teacher. The assumption of the identity of teacher is a strongly interpretative and interactive process and is inherently interwoven with school context. Early-career teachers' images of teaching and of themselves as teachers are significantly influenced by their prior experiences of schooling. The phase of pre-service education is judged as being a period in which the relational dimensions of teaching are substantially foregrounded by prospective teachers to the detriment of their development of pedagogical knowledge. Consequently, new teachers may enter the teaching profession with a naïve or inflated conception of their teaching competence in tandem with an underdeveloped capacity to effectively utilise the knowledge and skills imparted during the course of their pre-service education. This dissonance embodies particularly onerous ramifications for new teachers commencing

their careers in primary schools in designated areas of socio-economic disadvantage as they may fail to take due account of the effect of home and community influences on their pupils' learning.

The context of the new teacher's first school is a critical contributor to the formation and reformation of their professional identity. Its occupational culture serves to mould beginning teachers' views of themselves as teachers, of teaching and of the profession, while the novices actively position themselves to operate in harmony with the prevailing culture of the school so as to realise professional acceptance. This choreography however constitutes a substantial challenge for the novice whose personally held conceptions are at variance with the prevailing culture and practices of the school. It can result in either the repression or the endurance of pre-existing beliefs, in direct response to the maturity of their professional identity and the strength of their intrinsic motivations.

The support and acknowledgement new teachers receive from principals and colleagues are hugely influential in the development of their professional practice and identity. Despite this, the persistence in many school settings of a culture of individualism continues to have a gravely damaging effect on new teacher development while also serving to conceal deficient professional practice. The fostering of relationships with pupils constitutes a key personal and professional goal for all early-career teachers. While

positive relationships act as a source of intense job satisfaction, negative encounters most particularly in the context of classroom management challenges embody significant emotional consequences. In areas of greater socio-economic disadvantage where such experiences can occur with more frequent regularity, there is an increased propensity among new teachers to protect their professional integrity by allocating blame to pupils' family circumstances and in turn accelerating the spiral of pupil disinterest and teacher disillusionment. Direct engagement with parents is an area of professional practice for which newly qualified teachers feel particularly ill-prepared. As in the case of encounters with pupils, parental feedback can serve to elevate or devastate the novice's sense of self-as-teacher. The lesser engagement of parents is typically a feature of schools in designated areas of socio-economic disadvantage. Early-career teachers frequently fail to rationalise this phenomenon as being a manifestation of the inherent differences in parent-teacher socio-economic and cultural backgrounds and instead attribute it to parental disinterest and a lack of concern for learning, which in turn adversely impacts on pupils' participation and achievement.

CHAPTER 3

THE DESIGN OF THE STUDY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an in-depth overview of the research design and its subsequent implementation. It begins by returning to the underpinning theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism and examines how the adoption of this perspective formed the basis for the subsequent choices regarding research design. It outlines the context of the study and the manner in which the study participants were selected. It provides the research questions for which answers were sought over the course of the inquiry and it describes the justification for the employment of a multi-method, narrative-oriented, case-study approach. It outlines the research instruments employed and the manner in which they were piloted and ultimately used. The dual processes of data collection and analysis are presented in tandem with the measures employed to ensure their validity. The chapter concludes by affording due attention to a range of ethical concerns.

3.2 Theoretical Perspective and Research Design

Methodologically, contemporary symbolic interactionist studies are more diverse than Blumer's naturalistic inquiry in response to the emergence of a range of sub-traditions embodying distinctive approaches towards the study of social life (Travers, 2001). Contemporary research however continues to

retain three distinct features of earlier studies which are particularly pertinent to the research design at hand. Firstly, it is imperative that the researcher gains an understanding of the experiences of the beginning teachers through understanding what they themselves believe about their world. In striving to achieve this objective, Denzin (1971) argues that it is crucial to understand the definitions that actors give to their actions, even if to do so one has to ask them for retrospective accounts of past actions.

Secondly, in gathering data on the experiences of new teachers in primary schools in designated areas of socio-economic disadvantage it is important to gather that data through engagement with the actors in real situations. Sustained, critical and systematic engagement with the newly qualified teachers in their work context through observation, interviewing and written personal accounts allows the researcher to both understand and capture the perspectives of the new teachers (Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979). As Prus (1996) would suggest, it is only through conversing and extended role-taking activity that one may "tap into the life-worlds of the other on a more adequate (accurate, sustained and comprehensive) basis" (p. 23). Thirdly, the study must accommodate a careful description of human interaction, identifying concepts at work, comparing and contrasting manifestations of them, clarifying them, describing their role and noting their absence (Charon, 2001), akin to Blumer's (1969) 'exploration' and 'inspection'. In so doing,

processual approaches to beginning teachers' action are foregrounded in contrast to the more traditional models of causation.

3.2.1 Adopting an Interpretivist-Constructivist Orientation

In response to the theoretical stance and conceptual underpinnings of symbolic interactionism, an interpretivist orientation is being adopted in this research due to its emphasis on understanding rather than on explanation. Interpretivism in this context is seen to strive towards an imaginative understanding of the study of beginning teachers' first-year experiences. The interpretivist view of the human being as a dynamic, ever changing and evolving entity (Herman-Kinney & Verschaeve, 2003) can be readily reflected through the researcher's prolonged engagement with the study participants. Such an approach allows for indeterminacy rather than the need to seek causality. It simultaneously gives priority to showing patterns and connections rather than the expounding of linear reasoning. As interpretivism assumes "emergent, multiple realities; facts and values as inextricably linked; truth as provisional; and social life as processual" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 126), it is deemed to be fully compatible with the assumptions inherent in symbolic interactionism.

This interpretivist orientation is accompanied by the employment of a constructivist approach. While intending to understand the world of beginning teachers from the perspectives of the new teachers themselves, it

is also important to recognise the impact of the researcher's own background and experience, as detailed in Section 1.3.3. As Corbin (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) argues "...concepts and theories are *constructed* by researchers out of stories that are constructed by research participants who are trying to explain and make sense out of their experiences and/or lives, both to the researcher and to them" (p. 10). This approach therefore places priority on the phenomena of study, seeing both the data and the process of data analysis evolving from shared experiences and relationships with the study participants. In the context of this inquiry, the researcher is not only attempting to theorise the interpretive work of the early-career teachers themselves, but she is also acknowledging that the resulting theory or pattern of meanings is in itself an interpretation. Ultimately the utilisation of a constructivist approach is intended to foster the researcher's reflexivity about her own interpretations as well as those of her research participants (Charmaz, 2006).

3.3 Research Questions

This research investigates the induction and socialisation experiences of ten beginning primary teachers commencing their professional careers in schools in designated areas of socio-economic disadvantage. Six main questions have been used to guide the study. These questions were generated in response to the researcher's review of the extensive literature regarding the processes of learning to teach and becoming a teacher, her

prior experiences as a primary teacher in an urban school in a designated area of socio-economic disadvantage, and her current role as a primary schools' inspector and an evaluator of beginning teacher competence. The nature of the questions was also significantly influenced by the underlying rationale for engaging in this study as detailed in Section 1.2.1. The questions themselves were deliberately broadly framed so as to ensure that each study participant was provided with the greatest degree of autonomy in sharing their first-year experiences.

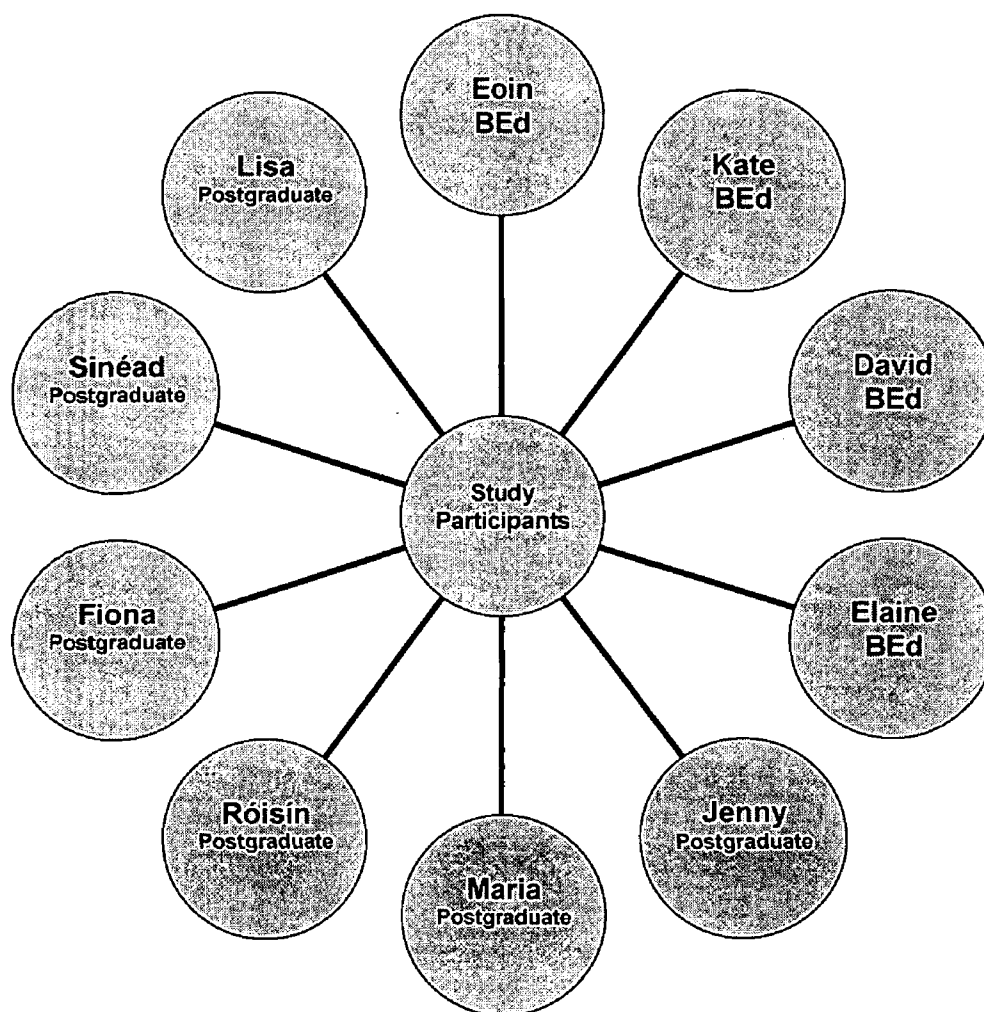
The questions are as follows:

1. How do beginning teachers experience their first year of teaching in urban primary schools in designated areas of socio-economic disadvantage?
2. What are the learning experiences they go through in learning to do what teachers do?
3. How does their professional identity, self-as-teacher, evolve over the course of their first year of teaching?
4. What are the factors that facilitate or impede the development of their professional knowledge and practice, and their professional identity?
5. How might support for beginning teachers in urban primary schools in designated areas of socio-economic disadvantage be improved?
6. How does a study of these changes assist us to understand the process of professional socialisation?

3.4 Context of the Study

The study participants, as presented in Figure 3.1, were drawn from a range of urban primary schools participating in the School Support Programme, Bands 1 and 2, under the DEIS Action Plan for Educational Inclusion (Department of Education and Science, 2005a).

Figure 3.1 Profile of participants and their qualifications



They were employed in schools within a defined catchment area, containing two Band 1 and three Band 2 schools, with two participants being based in each of the five schools. All the beginning teachers were in their first year of teaching following the successful completion of their Bachelor of Education (BEd) or postgraduate programmes of education. Each of the participants was engaged on a permanent or temporary employment contract in their schools, with the temporary teachers serving a minimum one-year contract. They were all employed as mainstream class teachers and were eligible to commence the process of probation (Department of Education and Science, 2006).

While the group of study participants was limited to ten, an effort was made to ensure a balance of male and female teachers, and teachers who had pursued both undergraduate and postgraduate routes into teaching. The selection of a relatively small number of participants was justified in order to track the changes that occurred in their thinking over the course of their first year in teaching through intensive engagement with and study of them.

3.4.1 Selection of Participants

The process of recruiting the study participants commenced prior to the beginning of the school year in which the research was undertaken in that the nature of the proposed inquiry was explained to the principals of the schools from which the participant beginning teachers were likely to be

drawn. As the process of appointing new teachers was taking place in these schools over the course of the summer holidays it was not possible to continue the recruitment process until the schools reopened for the new academic year. As soon as this occurred, telephone contact was made with the principals to ascertain the nature of the appointments they had made. The existence of prospective study participants was confirmed in each of the five schools. Having achieved the prior agreement of the principals, each of the schools was visited at a pre-arranged time to meet with the newly appointed beginning teachers to outline the purpose of the research and the manner in which it would be conducted. In these discussions, particular attention was afforded to outlining the likely time commitment that participation would require and to the range of ethical considerations as detailed in Section 3.11. These introductory meetings also served as an opportunity for the beginning teachers to raise any questions or concerns they had.

A written synopsis of the key points discussed at the meeting was provided to each attendee (Appendix 1). Prospective participants were encouraged to consider in detail all the information provided to them and to discuss it with a critical friend or colleague before making their final decision. In an effort to avoid placing any undue pressure on the participants to become involved in the study, follow-up contact was made directly with the principals to assess the level of interest and willingness to participate in the study. Fourteen

individual expressions of interest were received, from which the first ten were selected for participation in the study.

3.5 Research Design

In order to address the research questions and to afford primacy to the voices and experiences of the beginning teachers themselves, it was deemed appropriate to adopt a multi-method, narrative-oriented, case-study approach. Data was collected over the course of the study participants' first year in teaching using unstructured classroom observation; periodic, semi-structured interviews; and reflective journal writing, methods that are synonymous with qualitative research endeavours within the symbolic interactionist tradition.

3.5.1 Utilisation of a Multi-method Approach

The researcher's primary motivation for the adoption of a multi-method approach was to increase the breadth and depth of the data generated (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989). The realisation of different kinds of data and perspectives was required in order to understand the induction and socialisation experiences of the study participants in a more rounded and comprehensive fashion than might have been feasible had the data been drawn from just one method. Mason (2006) argues that social experience and lived realities are multi-dimensional and that "our understandings are impoverished and may be inadequate if we

view these phenomena only along a single dimension" (p. 10). The employment of three distinct yet complementary qualitative methods was judged to serve as a means of generating greater understanding and explanation of the first-year realities as experienced by the beginning teachers in the social contexts of their schools. The use of several data collection methods provided more detailed and multi-layered information (Kopinak, 1999), while also increasing the likelihood of gaining a more comprehensive "understanding of how they construct their lives and the stories they tell us about them" (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 722).

The use of multiple methods is not however without its drawbacks. While it involves the production of more data, it cannot be presumed that increased quantities of data will automatically improve the quality of the research. Darbyshire, MacDougall and Schiller (2005), in their use of multiple methods of qualitative research with children, ask the question "...as to whether these varied approaches to enabling children to describe their worlds create clearer insights and understandings or are they merely more grist to the methodological mill. Methodologically, is more better or is it simply more?" (pp. 423-424).

In the context of this inquiry, the employment of multiple methods of data collection allowed the participants to express themselves in ways that were complementary and congruent, while also facilitating contradiction and

change. In the interviews, personal stories were shared primarily in response to the researcher's questioning. In contrast, the content and frequency of accounts as recorded in the reflective journals were solely at the discretion of each of the individual study participants. The combination of both spoken and written word allowed for a greater power sharing between the researcher and the early-career teachers themselves and resulted in at least a partial resolution of any ethical concerns regarding the existence of a power differential between the researcher and the researched. The accounts that were shared served to mirror the ebb and flow of their first year in teaching and the joys and concerns that were experienced by the new teachers at critical points during that period. In this context, the reflexivity and flexibility of the multi-method qualitative approach offered a framework in which to develop new and deeper explanations from a range of different research methodologies (Hemming, 2008).

The secondary and related motivation for the adoption of a multi-method approach was significantly influenced by the researcher's commitment to corroborating and questioning the study's findings by comparing the data produced by the different methods. The use of a combination of methods within the same research paradigm is generally accepted as being less paradoxical than integrating methods across paradigms (Barbour, 1998). However, in utilising a multi-method approach the researcher was acutely aware of the criticisms of efforts to pursue methodological triangulation

within the qualitative research tradition due to the positivistic orientation of traditional conceptions of triangulation (for example Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Silverman, 1985) and the flawed nature of the conception of objective truth (Adami & Kiger, 2005). Allied to this is the perceived violation by methodological triangulation of the interactionist principles of emergence, fluidity, uniqueness and specificity (Denzin, 1997) and its considered inability to increase validity, reduce bias or bring objectivity (Fielding & Fielding, 1986).

In taking cognisance of these well-founded critiques, the researcher was committed to acknowledging and reflecting Miles and Huberman's (1994) interpretation of internal validity in the inquiry. They question: "Do the findings of the study make sense?, Are they credible to the people we study and to our readers?, Do we have an authentic portrait of what we are looking at?" (p. 278). As the engagement in classroom observation, the conducting of the periodic interviews and the completion of the reflective journals took place over the course of a full academic year, it allowed for the continual pursuance and cross-checking of lines of enquiry with both the study participants and across the data sets produced.

It is also important to note that the combination of the three qualitative methods of inquiry was a deliberate rather than an ad hoc (Morse, 2003) combination and a different weighting was afforded to the data that emerged

from each of the respective methods. While the rationale for the utilisation of each individual method is examined in detail in Section 3.6, it can be briefly summarised as follows. Engagement in the semi-structured interviews was the primary method of data collection and was afforded the greatest weighting. They allowed for the exploration of a wide range of themes pertinent to the inquiry. They included issues that had emerged through the researcher's review of the literature, her experience of working with newly qualified teachers, her consideration of the entries in the study participants' reflective journals as well as matters that had arisen during the observations she made in their individual classrooms. Ample opportunities were also provided for the new teachers to share issues of particular interest and concern to them.

Data that emerged through the study participants' continual recording of entries in their reflective journals served as the secondary data source. This data was compared and contrasted with other data, while entries also served to inject new issues for broader consideration. While the data gathered during the classroom observation sessions was rich and complex in nature, its purpose was solely to aid the interpretation of the interview contributions and the journal entries. As the researcher is presently employed as a primary schools' inspector and the practice of the beginning teacher participants was being evaluated for probationary purposes by her Inspectorate colleagues at the time of the inquiry, it was deemed unethical to

use the data that emerged from such observations in the writing up of the research study.

As a means of further contributing to the trustworthiness and completeness of the data and the subsequent data analysis, the researcher adopted a procedural approach to data analysis (Meijer, Verloop, & Beijaard, 2002). Through the utilisation of this approach data groups were considered and analysed in their own right, while also accommodating a comparison of the data emanating across the methods. Engaging meticulously in this process, as detailed fully in Section 3.9, contributed to the accuracy of the research findings and the level of confidence in them, while also generating new knowledge through a synthesis of the findings from the different approaches (Moran-Ellis et al., 2006).

3.5.2 Adoption of a Case-Study Approach

In pursuit of the interpretivist tradition that allows the researcher to place "one's self into the experience of the other" (Herman-Kinney & Verschaeve, 2003, p. 220), a case-study approach was judged to be most suitable. Yin (2003) suggests that case-study methodology is particularly valuable for investigating situations in which the researcher has little control over the events that occur in the real-life setting thus making it most amenable to the context of classrooms and schools. From the symbolic interactionist orientation of this inquiry, the case study displays a strong sense of time and

place, representing a commitment to the overwhelming significance of localised experience (Freebody, 2003). The selection of a total of ten cases across five different primary school settings serves to make the findings more compelling and the study more robust (Herriott & Firestone, 1983), while also aiding the extension of experience, the refinement of theory and the suggestion of complexities for further investigation (Stake, 2005).

A case-study approach was deemed to be efficacious in building up detailed descriptions of the experiences of the beginning teachers in their first year of teaching. It would preserve the integrity of their experiences and their meaning, and the making of interpretations in advance of data gathering would be avoided. Strategies and interpretations would evolve together in response to shifting researcher understandings. As a methodology, it was deemed advantageous when dealing with fluid teaching and learning situations and when seeking to access and understand changes in teacher-held meanings. Adopting a case-study approach was judged to enable the researcher to examine in rich and complex ways the changes that occur over time in the lives of the beginning teachers and in their understanding of themselves as teachers. It was considered that no other method would produce data of sufficient richness. As Shulman (1986) asserts, "Although principles are powerful, cases are memorable, and lodge as a basis for later judgements" (p. 32).

3.5.3 Employment of a Narrative Method

The use of narrative and a holistic orientation to learning to teach is grounded in Dewey's (1966) philosophy that we learn through experience and reflection. It is based on the education and development of the whole person who is becoming a teacher and it allows, through an exchange of stories and conversations, the analysis, ongoing support and continuous feedback for individuals as they grapple with the complexities of becoming members of the teaching profession (Beattie, 2000; Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). The adoption of a narrative orientation was seen to permit the new teachers to voice their most pressing issues and concerns, to examine prior knowledge in the light of new understandings and to construct new knowledge through the process of reflection, dialogue and inquiry (Doecke, Brown, & Loughran, 2000). While it was anticipated that some of the beginning teachers would be capable of engaging in more analytical reflection than others, it was also believed that each would be involved in constructing a personalised version of their experiences as early-career teachers. It was therefore decided that this method would be utilised in the context of both the periodic interviews and the reflective journals.

3.6 Instruments Used

Unstructured classroom observation, semi-structured periodic interviews and the maintenance of termly reflective journals were employed in the gathering of data in this inquiry.

3.6.1 Classroom Observation

The researcher engaged in unstructured observations of the study participants in their classrooms on one occasion during each of the three terms of their first year in teaching. Engagement in classroom observation provided the researcher with here-and-now experience (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the early-career teachers at work to complement their sharing of their experiences retrospectively through interviews and journal writing. While notes were recorded during and following the observations, formal observation was not undertaken as the purpose of the classroom visits was to provide a background against which subsequent interviews and journal entries might be interpreted. Consequently, the data recorded during these observation periods did not form part of the main data-analysis phase in which data gleaned through the interviews and the reflective journals were considered. The classroom observation data were also not utilised in the final writing up of this research.

This process of interpretation of the interview and journal generated data was significantly aided by engagement in periods of classroom observation as the experience of being intermittently present in the new teachers' classrooms allowed the researcher to be "a witness to how they react to what gets done to and around them" (Goffman, 1989). The periods of classroom observation also served as a useful stimulus for the initiation of conversations about matters of particular pertinence to the beginning

teachers themselves and to the study. In so doing, they allowed for the checking of the accuracy of the researcher-interpreted meanings of the actions and interactions observed (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Throughout the classroom observation process the researcher however remained ever conscious of her possible influence on what was occurring in the classroom, most particularly because of the professional role of primary schools' inspector which she normally fulfils.

3.6.2 Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted at the commencement and the conclusion of term one, and at the conclusion of terms two and three (Appendix 2). Their semi-structured nature allowed the researcher considerable freedom to probe beyond the set list of questions and to be guided by the responses of the individual interviewees, allowing them to answer more on their own terms (May, 2001). The interviews were used to provide a clear understanding and rich narrative of how the beginning teachers experienced their first year of teaching, focusing more on the significance of events rather than on a simple recounting of those events (Lawler, 2002). The interviews served to generate data across a wide range of themes through stimulating reflection on and discussion about actual events, emotions experienced and learning gleaned. They also served to further explore the issues addressed by individual participants in their reflective journals. In conducting the interviews, attention to each beginning

teacher's interpretation of his or her experience was paramount. Continual efforts were made to encourage the beginning teachers to teach the researcher how to interpret the significant experiences that were being shared.

The more traditional question-and-answer approach to interviewing was not adopted as it might have suppressed the respondents' stories (Mishler, 1986). The questions asked reflected a symbolic interactionist emphasis on learning about beginning teachers' views, experienced events and actions (Charmaz, 2006). As asserted by Bauer (1996), "...narrations are rich in indexical statements" (p. 3), in that reference is made to concrete events in place and time. Thus the eliciting of stories served to anchor the beginning teachers' accounts to events that had actually happened, with the story told, the manner and detail of its telling, the points emphasised and the morals drawn representing choices made by the storyteller (W. Holloway & Jefferson, 2000). In eliciting individual experiences, due regard was afforded to organisational and social processes and the individual beginning teachers' participation in them. Attentive listening was considered hugely important in order to be able to follow up on the themes in their narrated order. The respondents' own words and phrases were used in order to respect and retain the interviewee's meaning frames and the follow-up questions were constructed as loosely as possible and structured so as to elicit further narratives.

In conducting the interviews, the researcher was continually conscious of their interactional nature, of the reality that they are interpretively active, meaning-making occasions, in which data is co-constructed (Finlay, 2002; Fontana & Frey, 2005; Silverman, 2000). Consequently attention was afforded to both the interview process and product in ways that were sensitive to the social construction of knowledge (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, 2002). Cognisance was taken of the contextual and negotiated nature of the interview, in which the study participants' capacity to reproduce prior realities through story was to some extent influenced by the evolving researcher-participant relationship (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) as well as the vagaries of memory and selectivity (Chamberlayne, Bornat, & Wengraf, 2000).

3.6.3 Reflective Journals

The study participants' engagement in reflective journal writing was initiated as a means of aiding the beginning teachers' internal dialogue (Colton & Sparks-Langer, 1993), of reflecting their inner worlds and making of meaning (Hubbs & Brand, 2005) and of connecting their paths of action and reflection (Baldwin, 1991). In so doing however, it was overtly recognised that the early-career teachers would bring a continuum of reflective skills and attitudes to the task. Some of them would be able to engage in highly sophisticated reasoning and analysis of meanings, interactions and actions. For others, journal entries would be more restricted to brief description and response. The researcher was also continually cognisant of the role of each

individual participant in deciding on the nature and content of each entry, the manner in which particular incidents would be recalled in writing and the extent to which private experiences would be mediated (Atkinson & Delamont, 2005) .

Each beginning teacher was provided with a researcher-generated reflective journal at the commencement of each of the three terms in both hardcopy and electronic format (Appendix 3). They were provided with oral and written guidance to aid their completion of the journal and they were encouraged to record their ongoing learning experiences. In particular, they were encouraged to record in narrative format the detail of critical incidents that occurred in their classrooms or that they experienced in the wider school environment (Tripp, 1993; Wragg, 1994). They were similarly encouraged to move beyond a detailed description of the event to an analysis of and reflection on the meaning of the event for them (DeShon Hamlin, 2004; Griffin, 2003). It was continually communicated to the new teachers that critical incidents were not necessarily sensational events, but could instead represent minor, everyday events that were important to them. In so doing, the researcher was ever mindful that the criticality of such events was based on the justification, the meaning and the interpretation given to them by the early-career teachers themselves (Tripp, 1993).

A semi-structured framework was utilised to elicit responses across a range of themes drawn from the review of the literature, the experiences of the researcher in working with beginning teachers and feedback from the participants themselves. Freedom was also provided for participants to include additional themes of importance to them. The reflective journals served to facilitate the participants in reflecting on the context of their school setting, their initial teaching experiences, the types of support they received and their achievement of learning goals at key points during the outset of their careers.

3.7 Piloting Process

It was not feasible to pilot in full the semi-structured periodic interviews in advance of their usage for a number of reasons. Firstly, engagement in a full pilot would have required a year-long pilot phase as particular interview questions were directly related to specific time periods during the new teachers' first year in teaching. Secondly, the semi-structured nature of the periodic interviews used in this inquiry meant that the content could not have been definitively predetermined as it had to be responsive to the personality and experiences of the individual respondents and in turn it had to evolve in response to the ebb and flow of their first year in teaching.

In an effort to circumvent these challenges, core questions addressing pertinent themes were piloted with four beginning teachers in the final term

of their first year in teaching in the two DEIS Band 1 schools prior to the commencement of the formal research phase. This process served to highlight themes of particular importance both individually and collectively to this cohort of new teachers as they were nearing the conclusion of their first year in teaching. But more importantly for the researcher, it confirmed the importance of relationship building with the pilot-study participants if pertinent and personal stories were to be openly reflected upon and shared. It confirmed the importance of attentive listening, of avoiding the temptation to interject while also ensuring opportunities to follow-through on events recounted, of avoiding the over-use of education-laden terminology, and of ensuring to engage in unhurried and leisurely conversation.

The same four beginning teachers also agreed to pilot the use of the reflective journal for a period of four weeks during the final term of their first year in teaching. While this process confirmed that the early-career teachers were most capable of providing informative accounts of critical incidents that had occurred, additional scaffolding in the form of trigger questions was deemed necessary to facilitate their analysis of and reflection on these events. These modifications were made prior to the finalisation of the reflective journal template used in this research.

3.8 Data Collection Procedures

Following confirmation of the participants who were to partake in this study, telephone contact was made with each of them to make arrangements for the conducting of the first round of semi-structured interviews. This round of interviews was conducted in the participants' individual schools as this was deemed to be the most appropriate venue by them. They took place in their assigned classrooms at the conclusion of the school day. Prior to the interview commencing, each individual interviewee was reminded of the researcher's commitment to ensuring confidentiality and anonymity. They were further informed that the interview would only address matters which the individual beginning teacher was willing to discuss and that the interviewee could withdraw from the process at any point. Each participant was afforded adequate time to consider and discuss as required the details of the informed consent form (Appendix 4). Following the conclusion of the interview the reflective journal was presented and the guidelines to facilitate its completion were collaboratively reviewed.

Following discussion with and feedback from the study participants, the second, third and fourth rounds of interviews took place during the school day. The principal of each of the schools concerned arranged supervision for the beginning teacher's class and a quiet room for engaging in uninterrupted dialogue was provided. At the outset of each interview the commitment to the key ethical principles underlying the research were reiterated. All

interviews were audio recorded with the permission of the study participants. Brief handwritten notes were maintained during the course of the interview but were kept to a minimum so as to avoid undue interference. Additional handwritten notes were made immediately following the conclusion of each interview.

Only one of the ten beginning teachers opted to maintain the reflective journal electronically with the remainder completing their journal in handwritten format. While it was initially intended that the completed sections of the reflective journals would be submitted to the researcher on a weekly basis, following feedback from the participants it was decided that this would be amended to the end of each half-term. Each beginning teacher received a reminder, either directly or through a voice or text message, as the end of each half-term approached. Photocopies of the relevant sections of the reflective journals were forwarded by post to the researcher or collected by her following each end-of-term interview. The study participants were requested to retain the original copy of their reflective journal for their later review and consideration.

3.9 Process of Data Analysis

Each of the audio-recorded interviews was typed up following its completion. At the conclusion of each half-term, the extracts of the reflective journals for that period were similarly transferred to typed print. The process of recording

the data commenced in late September and concluded in the latter part of June of the following year. The data gathered in the course of the unstructured classroom observations were not considered during the process of data analysis.

The data from the periodic interviews and the reflective journals were initially analysed as two separate data sources, prior to comparing the data gathered across the methods. In analysing the data, the constant comparative method of data analysis combining inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all units of meaning obtained (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used. As the primary purpose of this inquiry is the development of understanding about how beginning teachers develop their professional knowledge and practice and sense of self-as-teacher in the first year of their teaching career, it was considered most appropriate to select a method of data analysis consistent with this goal.

In so doing, considerable care was taken to ensure that the concepts and categories used to organise the data and to present the researcher's emerging understanding of the early-career teachers' first-year experiences spoke sensitively to those self-same experiences. This action reflected the researcher's awareness of the criticism of the use of analytic induction in studies underpinned by a symbolic interactionist theoretical framework (for example Hammersley, 1990) and her commitment to the use of analytic

perspectives and techniques which served to discover and generate interpretations of the social world of beginning teaching. She was also conscious of the need not to restrict her analysis and theorising to a detailed description of the local. While she was cognisant of Wolcott's (1994) problematising of generalisability, she was simultaneously committed to moving from the uniqueness of the individual cases to developing an understanding of the more general processes at work. Her creative as well as disciplined interaction with the data served to respond to her aim of "develop[ing] theoretical ideas about social process[es]...that have relevance beyond the data themselves" (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 163) and her commitment to saying "something authoritative about instances beyond the specific ones of the research" (Williams, 2002, p. 126).

The software package MAXqda 2007 was employed to assist in the data analysis process due to its capacity to aid in the effective management of significant amounts of narrative-based qualitative data (Lewins & Silver, 2007). In so doing the importance of the whole of the data in understanding the part was maintained, including a keen focus on the recognition of inconsistencies and contradictions. This was done in an effort to avoid the fragmentation of the data which might in turn have resulted in the form of the data being overlooked (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

Each unit of meaning selected for analysis, was compared to all other units of meaning and subsequently grouped, categorised and coded with similar units of meaning. If there were no similar units of meaning, a new category was formed. In this process provision was made for continuous refinement; initial categories were changed, merged or omitted; new categories were generated; and new relationships were discovered (Goertz & LeCompte, 1981). As Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest, the categorising and coding process brought together into provisional categories those data that apparently related to the same content.

The data that emanated from each individual study participant was reviewed. This process involved each beginning teacher's data being read to identify significant events or processes that appeared to explain their professional development and the evolution of their professional identity. The identification of significance was based on existing theoretical models that have identified certain factors as important influences on teachers' socialisation, but also the significance that the beginning teachers themselves placed on certain events or processes. This latter practice was deemed critical to ensuring verification of the data analysis and interpretation practices of the researcher by those who had created the data. They in turn were used to construct an in-depth understanding of each beginning teacher. Items were clustered under general headings to provide a common structure that would enable later comparisons across the cases to be made more

easily, but also with some idiosyncratic headings where these were deemed appropriate for the particular case.

The second and key stage of analysis involved looking across the cases of the beginning teachers. In so doing, it became possible to identify a number of common themes of learning to teach which mapped out the development of the beginning teachers and which provided useful markers on which to compare and contrast their experiences. These features related to the questions that had initiated the study, the issues that emerged through the ongoing analysis of the classroom observation notes, the interview transcripts and the reflective journal extracts, and those aspects that had become the foci of subsequent discussions with the beginning teachers.

3.10 Validity of the Research

The validity of the research has previously been considered in Section 3.5.1 in the context of the adoption of a multi-method approach. It is important to also consider the trustworthiness of the data and their interpretation in the broader research context. In the case of this inquiry, very considerable volumes of transcript material were produced that were open to multiple interpretations. In an effort to address possible concerns regarding the extent to which the researcher can be believed and confidence can be placed in the study outcomes (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994), it was necessary to afford particular attention to the accuracy of the study

participants' self-reports and possible unease in relation to the manner in which the data were interpreted. Further strategies were employed to increase the validity of the research and included prolonged engagement with the research participants, the use of an external audit trail and engagement in peer review.

3.10.1 The Accuracy of the Beginning Teachers' Self-reports

In this study the beginning teachers self-reported through semi-structured interviews and the recording of entries in their reflective journals. Through these two methods, the novices outlined their experiences, conceptions and beliefs as well as significant events that occurred over the course of their first year in teaching. In an effort to ensure that the accounts and stories presented were genuine, a number of steps were taken. Participants were assured of absolute confidentiality and considerable time was devoted to developing their trust and confidence to ensure honest cooperation. In outlining the broad aims of the research, it was explained that it may not be possible for them to answer all questions asked and that an acknowledgement of this was preferred to providing a contrived answer. This combination of factors aided in the realisation of an honest insight into the new teachers' emerging practice.

3.10.2 Interpretation of the Data

A second possible source of invalidity rested in the interpretation of the data. In an effort to guard against the influence of the researcher's own beliefs and assumptions or being unduly influenced by particularly memorable events that occurred during the data collection process, a number of strategies were adopted. Firstly, the interactive and iterative nature of data collection (Miles & Huberman, 1984) facilitated a constant verification, elaboration and checking out of interpretations, with provisional interpretations being tested against further data. In constructing the individual case accounts, the transcripts were scrutinised to identify significant processes and events. Where any doubt existed, they were re-read to glean further evidence regarding the identified feature. A case account of each beginning teacher was prepared for verification at the end of the research period. Each study participant was asked to comment on their personal case, affording considerable attention to the accuracy of the interpretations made by the researcher and the particular experiences recorded over the one-year period. The combination of these steps served to guard against the major areas of bias that might have influenced this particular study.

3.10.3 Prolonged Engagement with the Research Participants

Prolonged engagement with the research participants was achieved through the process of engaging with them on multiple occasions and using a variety of means over an entire academic year. This level of intense engagement

along with the ongoing process of simultaneous data collection and analysis allowed for the development of the scope and depth of this study. This in turn served to enhance the credibility of the research findings.

3.10.4 External Audit Trail

This researcher collected and preserved information in accordance with the six categories of the Halpern audit trail as reproduced by Lincoln and Guba (1985): raw data, data reduction and analysis products; data reconstruction and synthesis products; process notes; materials relating to intentions and dispositions; and instrument development information. The maintenance of this documentation allows the researcher to walk others through this work, from beginning to end, in order that they may understand the journey taken and assess the trustworthiness of the outcomes.

3.10.5 Peer Review

Qualitative researchers who work alone frequently find their research being condemned for being biased. The trustworthiness of research can evidently be increased by working with others. While working with a research team was not feasible in the context of this inquiry, the researcher's thesis supervisor acted in many respects as a peer debriefer (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.11 Ethical Concerns

Barnes (1979) defines ethical decisions in research as those that "arise when we try to decide between one course of action and another not in terms of expediency but by reference to standards of what is morally right or wrong" (p. 16). As a primary schools' inspector working with newly qualified teachers, the researcher frequently has to fulfil an induction role while being ever cognisant that her primary role is that of an evaluator of beginning teacher competence. In the context of this inquiry, she relinquished her evaluative function to Inspectorate colleagues with regard to the beginning teachers who volunteered to participate. In so doing, the advice and support function that she would normally fulfil was similarly discharged by these colleagues. Most importantly, the new teachers who participated in this study were in no way disadvantaged by agreeing to partake. They continued to receive the same degree of guidance to support their emerging practice as did their fellow probationers.

The foregrounding of the researcher role was deemed to be critical and it was realised in a manner that served to address any possible complexity of power relations between the researcher and the study participants. In an effort to achieve this objective, issues of power were focused on in a relational, dynamic and positive way, embodying understanding and respect and the capacity to transcend structural power differences (W. Holloway & Jefferson, 2000). While it was clearly understood that such an approach

would never succeed in fully equalising power, it made it negotiable rather than an inevitable effect of status differences.

Bullough (1989) raises a further pertinent ethical dilemma in fulfilling the dual role of researcher-inspector. He questions the ethical responsibility of withholding information that could in the hands of a beginning teacher prevent serious difficulty for either the teacher or the children being taught. While respecting his view, the researcher was strongly of the belief that her advice and support role had to be backgrounded for the sake of the validity of the study. While doing so she was confident that this duty of care was being fulfilled by her Inspectorate colleagues who were now assigned to the study participants to conduct the probation process.

As a means of ensuring ethical integrity throughout the research process, there were a number of additional issues that needed to be considered and planned for in advance, while also taking due account of the guidelines of the Research Ethics' Committee of St Patrick's College. Such ethical issues were concerned with ensuring that both the rights and welfare interests of participants were safeguarded (BPS, 1996), in particular that due regard was afforded to the issues of informed consent, and confidentiality, privacy and anonymity.

3.11.1 Informed Consent

Prospective participants were drawn from a limited number of schools within a defined catchment area. In order for them to give informed consent, they had first to be provided with the necessary introductory information. The researcher visited the schools concerned at the commencement of the academic year as soon as the beginning teacher appointments had been finalised. In discussion with the newly appointed teachers, she outlined the purpose of the study and the manner in which it would be conducted. In particular, attention was afforded to consideration of the use of a narrative approach to research as it may have been an approach that the prospective participants had not experienced before. In tailoring the information that was to be provided, the topic was not constrained too narrowly, as the purpose of the research was to explore beginning teachers' socialisation into their new environments rather than to encourage arguments, opinions and explanations regarding beginning teaching generally.

In an effort to curtail the effect of the researcher-participant power differential, prospective participants were encouraged to take a period of time to consider their decision regarding participation in the study. Their principals were dissuaded from actively encouraging their involvement in response to the researcher's existing relationship with the schools concerned. The participants' individual decisions to become involved in this inquiry were made based on their understanding of, interest in, availability

for, and willingness to participate. It was also made clear to them that they could choose to withdraw from the study at any time and that they could subsequently request the removal of any data relating to them. As the research process transpired, decisions to participate and maintain involvement had less to do with the information that was offered, although its importance was not nullified, but they had more to do with the participants' feelings about and relationship with the researcher (W. Holloway & Jefferson, 2000).

3.11.2 Confidentiality, Privacy and Anonymity

Confidentiality is frequently seen as one of the least problematic of ethical concerns. Participants were assured from the outset that all raw data relating to them would be safely stored and that access to this material would be rigorously restricted to the researcher's supervisor and herself. However, maintaining anonymity and confidentiality in their fullest sense proved more challenging. Conducting qualitative research in the interpretive tradition produces significant amounts of narrative data that are in turn rigorously interrogated. In presenting the analysis and conclusions in the final written format, the use of specific quotes from the participants provides support for the credibility of the findings. However, including actual quotes from participants can legitimately be construed as breaking confidentiality, even if their anonymity can be assured. As a means of addressing this ethical dilemma, participants were informed at the outset that every effort would be

made to maintain their anonymity but that actual quotes would be used in the research report.

Related to the issue of confidentiality is that of privacy. The data gathered emanated from periodic interviews and study participants' entries in their reflective journals as they engaged in conversations and story telling regarding their emerging practice. Throughout this process, the researcher regularly communicated to them that areas that they did not wish to address or issues that they did not wish to disclose would not be probed. The choice to reveal was considered to be part of the continuing dynamic between the researcher and the individual participants. It transpired that the relationships that developed with the study participants over the year-long course of the study minimised the number of matters that had to be avoided and provided the participants with the freedom to respond frankly to the issues raised in an environment characterised by honesty and respect. The extent to which more sensitive matters were pursued or explored required perceptive negotiation and trust; the researcher trusting the beginning teachers to report faithfully upon their experiences and the beginning teachers trusting the researcher to maintain confidences and at the same time not to misinterpret or misuse the data provided (Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997).

As Bogdan and Biklen (1992) point out, anonymity of research participants protects these subjects of research from harm and ensures that they are not

inhibited and are responding voluntarily. However, ensuring anonymity in a piece of qualitative research using a small sample size and a unique population within a defined catchment area cannot be guaranteed. While files were securely maintained on each of the individual cases and pseudonyms were applied to participants, children, colleagues, mentors and principals, some salient detail in the final report may lead to the recognition of a participant or his or her school. It was explained to the participants that every effort would be made to ensure their anonymity and that of their schools but that it could not be absolutely guaranteed. On the researcher's part, great care was taken in analysing and presenting the data, for example in scrutinising the details of the context of a situation that might lead to the identity of a participant being revealed, while also ascertaining the meaning of the data.

A debriefing session with the full cohort of beginning teacher participants was convened at the conclusion of the research process. It allowed for a consideration of any ethical issues that had arisen during the course of the study and it served to facilitate discussion on the participants' experiences of the process in order to consider any unforeseen negative effects. Regular probing interviews and the maintenance of reflective journals about one's experience over a one-year period were seen as likely to heighten the new teachers' awareness of their actions and also to clarify their thinking about their role and their personal and professional goals. While it was deemed

probable that they would be affected by the research, it was hoped that the outcomes of the process would be perceived as being beneficial to their development as teachers. The debriefing session confirmed that no negative consequences were experienced by any of the study participants as a result of their involvement in this research.

3.12 Conclusion

The nature of this inquiry, which is underpinned by the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism and is interpretivist-constructivist in nature, dictated the adoption of a multi-method, narrative-oriented, case-study approach. The use of the dual methods of periodic, semi-structured interviews and termly reflective journals, in tandem with engagement in intermittent, unstructured classroom observation, served to provide a continual flow of personalised and rich stories of the experiences and encounters of the cohort of ten early-career teachers. The use of the constant comparative method of data analysis, in tandem with adherence to the concerns of validity and the practice of ethical research, served to productively generate understanding about how new teachers develop the capacity to become proficient at what they do and confident in whom they are.

CHAPTER 4

THE JOURNEY INTO THE TEACHING PROFESSION

4.1 Introduction

In order to fully understand the induction and socialisation experiences of the beginning primary teachers who participated in this study, it is imperative to firstly revisit the initial stages of their journey into the teaching profession. Analysis of their respective decisions to enter teaching, their experiences of pre-service education as a preparation for teaching and their recruitment into their first teaching positions forms the basis of this chapter.

4.2 The Decision to Go Into Teaching

The study participants' decisions to enter the primary teaching profession were influenced by a range of factors. Chief among these were the power of intrinsic motivation, the desire for a career change, the impact of familial influence and the role of former experiences of primary and post-primary schooling. Each will be examined in turn.

4.2.1 The Role of Intrinsic Motivation

Kate and Elaine expressed experiencing a strong desire to become primary teachers from an early age. They possessed a clearly formed vision of themselves as teachers and this early-onset commitment coincided with their stated enjoyment of schooling. Kate recounts memories from her own primary schooling experience that remain vivid for her today:

...since I can remember, teaching is the only thing I ever wanted to do...I just love organisation, I love everything kind of organised, the thoughts of writing on the blackboard and...you know the silly little things from when you're younger. I had that idea from when I was very small.

Kate, Interview 1, Term 1

For other participants the desire to become a primary teacher came to the fore of their career options in the latter stages of their post-primary schooling. For David and Eoin, it competed temporarily with other career options, with primary teaching winning out when the pros and cons of the competing careers were analysed.

Kate, Elaine, David and Eoin were successful in securing places in the colleges of teacher education on concluding the Leaving Certificate examination and they commenced a Bachelor of Education degree immediately on completing their post-primary schooling.

For Maria and Fiona, despite a strongly held desire to become a primary teacher, the required points for entry into primary teaching were not achieved in the Leaving Certificate examination. As a consequence, both expressed a sense of becoming "side tracked". Fiona pursued a range of undergraduate courses culminating in the successful completion of an arts degree. Maria, like Sinéad and Róisín, opted to commence studying to pursue a career in post-primary teaching. In contrast, Jenny and Lisa did not display any particular interest in teaching in their later teens and chose to

commence their higher education experience in non-education-related areas.

4.2.2 Opting for a Career Change

These latter six study participants followed the more circuitous, postgraduate route into primary teaching. Of these, Lisa engaged in the greatest degree of career change. She was well established in her chosen career. For her, the decision to go into primary teaching was a more challenging one, as is evidenced in her comment:

It definitely was a difficult decision. I was at a point where I had my own house and things like that. You're going back to the start again really, financially and level wise. Even when you go into the workplace, you see graduates fully qualified at twenty one.

Lisa, Interview 1, Term 1

Sinéad had returned to Ireland from another jurisdiction where she had qualified and taught for a number of years at post-primary level. Due to the non-availability of a post-primary teaching position on her return, she engaged in substitute teaching in a variety of primary schools. This opportunity created a significantly positive shift in her view of primary teaching as a career.

Róisín, Fiona and Maria successfully completed their arts' degrees and they engaged in varying amounts of substitute teaching at post-primary and primary levels. For each of them, this experience clarified their preferred

sector in which to teach and heightened their aspiration to pursue primary teaching as a career.

Jenny experienced the greatest level of uncertainty in choosing her initial undergraduate course option. On successfully completing her non-education-related degree, the opportunity to engage in substitute teaching at primary level convinced her that primary teaching was her preferred career option.

4.2.3 The Impact of Family

One might expect that in instances where immediate family members were serving teachers, that this would serve to influence the career choices of the study participants. However in the case of Kate and Elaine, who both expressed a strong desire to become primary teachers from an early age, neither had immediate or extended family members who were involved in teaching.

In contrast, Jenny and Lisa, who both had immediate family members who were serving primary teachers, opted for the undergraduate programmes of learning most removed from teaching as a career. While this outcome might imply that familial influence on career choice was weak, both Jenny and Lisa productively used familial experience in teaching as a source of guidance and support in choosing to alter their career paths.

For the remaining participants, while many had extended family members who were serving teachers, only Fiona had an immediate family member who was teaching. It was also interesting to note that both Fiona's and Maria's fathers had a desire to become teachers, but their career plans had not transpired due to family and other circumstances. Both were of the view that this was an influencing factor on their ultimate career choice.

4.2.4 The Role of Former Teachers

Participants' experiences of schooling at both primary and post-primary levels, and in particular the differing teachers they encountered across the years, influenced them in a variety of ways. The qualities of their former teachers and their perceptions of the quality of the teaching they experienced proved significant.

The passion of particular teachers for teaching, their capacity to communicate curriculum content and in turn their ability to inspire learners were strongly recurring influencing forces. Róisín, who described herself as not having been greatly interested in school, vividly recalls her post-primary English and geography teachers:

I just thought of school as something you have to do and I don't have much time for this and I'd rather do other things. Whereas going into their classes I just thought it's not like sitting here listening to boring poetry. My English teacher acted things out and made things really exciting. My geography teacher used to tell stories and relate to our experiences and relate it to his experiences. And even looking back you'd remember everything he said to you because of the way he taught. It was their passion definitely...The two teachers were really, really good and I just thought if I could teach somebody like that and if I could influence somebody like that it would be just amazing.

Róisín, Interview 1, Term 1

However, not all experiences of schooling were positive. The study participants equally recalled teachers and teaching experiences that they judged to be less desirable and memorable. Eoin clearly recollects his experiences of his first-year teacher of Irish in post-primary school:

We had a teacher for Irish...it was very kind of by the book like. We came in in first year and she started going over grammar. We'd say we didn't get it, she'd say "tough, you should know this" [imitating teacher's voice]...She'd no real personality either. There'd be no bit of, no bit of chat. Her thing would be straight to work and you'd be sick of it. Then she didn't try to change it [her teaching], like seeing we weren't getting it, and she wouldn't change it or try and do anything different with it.

Eoin, Interview 1, Term 1

Negative experiences of teachers and teaching served to clarify the type of teacher the study participants did not wish to become. They also facilitated them to construct images and means of how they might approach a learning experience differently to ensure greater teacher effectiveness and enhanced learning outcomes for pupils. The study participants not only preferred teachers who were committed to and skilful in the execution of teaching, but

facets of teacher personality and the nature of the relationships they formed were also critically important. Former teachers who simultaneously embodied passion, craft and the capacity to form bonds were considered by them to be exceptional teachers.

Schooling experiences were judged by the study participants to influence to an extent the way in which they now taught as new teachers. They explained that as they taught, memories of former teachers, in particular their attitudes and the manner in which they taught, resurfaced. For some, reverting back to their own experiences of schooling was confirmed as being a prominent influence on their practice, as their experience of schooling and teachers was something with which they were intimately familiar. While for others, this re-emergence was accompanied by an internal deciphering of the aspects of observed and experienced practice to be discarded or reproduced.

4.3 Pre-service Education as a Preparation for Teaching

Of the ten beginning teachers who participated in this study, four completed a three-year Bachelor of Education degree and six participated in a postgraduate course in education of approximately eighteen months duration. Engagement in dialogue to explore their perspectives on the effectiveness of pre-service education as a preparation for teaching centred on the perceived relevance of the course content addressed and the impact

of teaching practice on the development of their professional competence and professional identity.

4.3.1 The Perceived Relevance of Course Content

Overall, the study participants reflected positively on their involvement in their respective teacher education courses with such reflection producing a number of common themes. Many study participants identified a marked distinction between particular aspects of course content. A preference was regularly expressed for content that had overtly addressed curriculum and pupil learning matters. As Elaine admitted:

Well I definitely would say that second year was the best because it was the curriculum subjects we were doing. Whereas the other years it would have been philosophy of education and that kind of thing. But second year, I really loved second year. The hands on and doing what the children would be doing. I really liked the curriculum subjects.

Elaine, Interview 1, Term 1

Concern however was expressed by some participants regarding the comprehensiveness in which aspects of curriculum and associated teaching methodologies were addressed due to time constraints within their courses. This view was more prevalent in the feedback from the beginning teachers who had participated in postgraduate courses in education. Róisín recalls in particular the impact of time pressures in addressing curriculum matters and its consequential impact on her teaching of reading:

I found it quite hard. I had no idea. I had a senior infant class in May for teaching experience and that's the only, the lowest level I had. So I had no idea how children were taught reading. I think I had two hours of a lecture one day and that was it. I kind of thought I might as well not have been in college for that week because I didn't learn anything anyway.

Róisín, Interview 1, Term 1

The more theoretical aspects of course content, including the "ologies", were regarded less favourably. In particular their relative usefulness in the context of direct classroom experience was called into question.

The study participants reported a wide variation in the extent to which issues of educational disadvantage were addressed in their pre-service education courses. Some participants confirmed that their understanding of educational disadvantage had been fostered through courses taken in sociology of education and in social, personal and health education. Others reported that the matter had not been addressed at all in their course content and that their learning had been confined to experiences of teaching practice in less advantaged schools. For the Bachelor of Education graduates, teaching in areas of educational disadvantage had been available for selection as an area of specialisation. However, Kate was the only participant who had chosen this area for elective study.

The most overwhelming feedback from the study participants was the perceived failure of their courses to adequately address the practical concerns that they now faced in their newly acquired classrooms. Issues

related to school attendance, classroom management and organisation, the supervision of recreational breaks and interactions with parents loomed large in the early weeks of teaching. Maria's viewpoint is strongly reflective of the opinions of the cohort of beginning teachers:

...basic classroom things, just basic things like filling out the roll, how you manage different little things, real practical things, I felt that wasn't done at all. It would have been more important as opposed to going into psychology and sociology. If we'd done more practical things it would have been more beneficial to us.

Maria, Interview 1, Term 1

4.3.2 The Role of Teaching Practice

Teaching practice was unanimously judged as being a simultaneously exhilarating and enervating experience. Despite the inherent professional and emotional demands, the experience confirmed for many participants that their selection of primary teaching as a career had been the correct choice for them. The demands of each particular teaching practice assignment simultaneously forced and facilitated the new teachers to develop their professional understanding and practice.

As in the case of participants' experiences of their own schooling, school-based pre-service experiences also served as a useful mechanism to assist them to clarify the type of teacher they wished or did not wish to become. In the course of teaching practices they observed and evaluated the personality traits and ways of working of their host teachers. In situations where

beginning teachers' evolving conceptions of themselves as teachers jarred with their experiences of their hosts, it resulted in a strengthening of the pre-existing images that these teachers held dearly. Róisín reflects thoughtfully on her experience of this process:

I suppose you're working so closely with a teacher and sometimes you work. Sometimes you have the same ideas as some teachers you work with. And other teachers you don't have the same principles and you don't have the same ways of teaching. You're only learning yourself. I kind of went with ideas in my head of what I wanted to be like. I remember one teacher in particular I worked with. She shouted a lot. She was a very good teacher but she spent a lot of time shouting over just simple things. I had a pain in my head from a day of it. I remember thinking I don't want to be like that and I suppose you learn how you don't want to be from teachers as well.

Róisín, Interview 1, Term 1

Periods of teaching practice were judged by the study participants to be lynchpin elements of their pre-service programmes of learning and significant contributors to the development of their professional competence. However, they found that the experience of entering their full-time classrooms contrasted sharply with their prior experiences of walking into a ready-made classroom in which they were instructed and guided as to what to teach.

4.4 Recruitment Into the Teaching Profession

As the participants' pre-service education programmes were concluding, each began the process of applying for teaching positions in which to formally commence their teaching careers. In so doing, their primary concern

was to secure a teaching post, rather than to obtain a position in a particular school or type of school.

4.4.1 Securing a Job

Of the ten participants, Jenny, Kate, Maria, Róisín and Sinéad had secured permanent teaching positions by the commencement of the school year. David, Eoin, Elaine, Lisa and Fiona were appointed to their posts in a temporary, but full-year, capacity. David and Eoin's positions became permanent half way through their first term of teaching. All the participants, with the exception of David and Eoin, were from the immediate or local area of the schools in which they were appointed.

4.4.2 Introduction to the School

A majority of the study participants had prior direct experience of the schools in which they were appointed. In the main, this consisted of periods of teaching practice and/or substitute teaching. These teachers, with the exception of Sinéad, confirmed that this experience served as a useful pre-introduction to the staff and to the general operation of the school. In turn, their more formal entry into the school the following September occurred with greater ease and less apprehension. However, for Sinéad, entry into her newly acquired position brought with it significant disappointment:

The funny thing was I was here for five weeks doing my teaching practice and I thought I knew it all. I came in here and I realised I knew nothing.

Sinéad, Interview 2, Term 1

During her teaching practice period, Sinéad had worked very closely and productively with her host teacher. However, when she returned the following September as a permanent member of the teaching staff, she found that her host teacher and a number of other staff members had left and that, from her perspective, a different school atmosphere prevailed.

A minority of the study participants had no direct prior experience of their schools. Maria, who lived in relatively close proximity to her school, had been provided with access to the school over the course of the summer holidays. As a result she had opportunities to meet informally with the principal, to acquaint herself with the school environment and to prepare her own particular classroom for the commencement of the new school year. This proved to be particularly helpful to and important for her. However, there was no such phased entry into school for Eoin and David. Both secured their positions as the new school year was commencing and they were relocating geographically as their pupils were returning to school. Their entry into the profession was characterised by both haste and uncertainty as is vividly recalled by Eoin:

I didn't even know what class I was going to have. I just arrived here on Monday morning, nothing on me except the clothes on my back. First of all I was being sent to second class and then he [the principal] said "no, go to fourth class" [imitating principal's voice]. So I just arrived in and they're all looking up at me.

Eoin, Interview 1, Term 1

4.5 Conclusion

The decisions of the study participants to enter the primary teaching profession reflect a blend of Manuel's (2003) idealism and fantasy and Flores and Day's (2006) pragmatic considerations of security and stability. Prior schooling experiences and in particular images and recollections of former teachers served as an important interpretive lens and were used by the novices to contribute to their decision-making process. As purported by Knowles (1992), the positive and negative models of teaching as provided by these former teachers continued to serve an important socialising function on the new teachers' formal entry into their first classrooms.

The findings of this study regarding the perceived effectiveness of pre-service education programmes as a preparation for teaching strongly echo those of Killeavy and Murphy (2005) and the Department of Education and Science's Inspectorate (2005). While expressing general satisfaction with their respective initial teacher education experiences, varying levels of preparedness to take on the breadth of responsibilities of the newly appointed teacher were consistently recounted. The challenge of dealing

with a plethora of practical school matters was reported as being intensely onerous, most particularly in the first weeks of teaching.

The seminal role of teaching practice experiences and the perceived irrelevance of the more theoretical aspects of course content, as concluded by Garrahy et al. (2005) in their study of beginning teachers, were vigorously confirmed. Teaching practice periods were used by the study participants to validate their career choices and to advance their evolving conceptions of self-as-teacher (Bullough et al., 1991). Despite their expressions of qualified satisfaction with their pre-service programmes of education, the newly qualified teachers' move to the full-time classroom marked a significant shift in the intensity of the professional demands being experienced by them. In making this transition, an elevated degree of unease and discomfort was more pronounced among the newly appointed teachers who had no prior direct experience of the schools in which they secured employment.

CHAPTER 5

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

5.1 Introduction

The move from pre-service education to a full-time teaching position marks a major transition in the learning continuum of beginning teachers. It generally coincides with a period of reality shock and adjustment that varies in duration and intensity. Novices are simultaneously presented with the necessity to learn about pupils and their school context, to meet the demands of planning and preparation, to come to a situated understanding of curriculum and assessment, to design and implement effective programmes of instruction while also successfully juggling a range of classroom management demands. Co-occurring with this plethora of unparalleled, first-time learning experiences is the prospect of probation. It is to these related matters that this chapter attends.

5.2 Learning About Pupils

From their very first classroom encounter the beginning teachers commenced the process of getting to know and understand their pupils. The first day of school was fraught with a combination of excitement and anxiety as the novices made their initial connection with and assessment of their cohort of pupils. For some of them, this first day at school brought with it a degree of reality shock as recounted by Maria:

Children came in without a pencil case even on the first day, or maybe just a pencil in the bottom of the bag. And I think in any country school every child would have their pencil case and their new colours. Most of them came in with nothing.

Maria, Interview 1, Term 1

For most of the beginning teachers those early days passed relatively smoothly as they attempted to familiarise themselves with newly introduced names and faces. Many of them were struck from the outset by the diversity of pupils in their classes, most particularly the combination of newcomer and Traveller pupils, as well as pupils with special educational needs. They were also variously struck by the levels of socio-economic disadvantage that were reflected in their direct encounters with pupils. The preponderance of overt manifestations varied from one school context to the next in response to the socio-economic mix present in the individual school. However, even in circumstances in which explicit indications of disadvantage were not prevalent, its symptoms were found to be thinly disguised for a significant percentage of the pupils. In the more disadvantaged schools, the beginning teachers were taken aback in particular by the gaping variation in pupil achievement levels.

The early-career teachers quickly came to understand more fully the challenging home circumstances that many of their pupils were experiencing, most particularly the problems of family breakdown, substance abuse, poverty and violence. Much of this learning was facilitated through their direct engagement with the pupils themselves and their observation of

them at work and at play. It was also achieved through information exchanges with parents and with other teachers in their schools, most particularly the home/school/community liaison coordinators. Frustration was experienced and expressed by some of the study participants in response to the impact of pupils' personal and family circumstances on their engagement with schooling. Aspects that caused the new teachers greatest concern were the perceived apathy of particular parents to the value of schooling and the non-provision of parental support for pupils, most particularly in the completion of homework assignments. Eoin became increasingly exasperated with one of his pupils due to her perceived disinterest:

She has to be pushed to do everything. "Take out your copies there, Tracey get out your copy" [imitating own voice]. And she'd take it out, "open your copy". It's her attitude and her whole family are like that. I met them at the parent-teacher meeting and that's just the way she is. There's no value put on education at all I'd say. Look, what can you do?

Eoin, Interview 2, Term 1

For a minority of the beginning teachers, disparaging attitudes to pupils and their families were expressed as their level of irritation increased. However, for the majority, their growing awareness of pupils' home circumstances had the opposite effect. Their new-found knowledge and understanding led them to a greater appreciation of how some of their pupils lived their lives, as attested to by Fiona:

Because of the backgrounds a lot of them are lucky to be in school really at times. You'd see them coming in and they'd be absolutely shattered tired and the head down on the desk. You'd know that they were probably in the room watching telly while the parents were probably fighting or roaring. It's the only way for them, go into their room and watch TV, turn up the volume. And they can't sleep then with that going on. It's very turbulent for them.

Fiona, Interview 4, Term 3

For these teachers, the process of learning about pupils assisted in fostering a strong teacher-pupil bond as they came to use this knowledge to make the schooling experience increasingly responsive to their pupils' emotional needs. Relationships with pupils were built based on a shared, and sometimes unspoken, knowledge that teacher knew and understood what life was really like at home and that teacher was striving to make school a safe and happy place to learn.

As time progressed, the beginning teachers moved from having a general grasp of their pupils as a group to a greater appreciation of their individual abilities and needs. This new knowledge was accompanied by an increasing confidence in planning and structuring learning opportunities. This process of professional learning was not however without its intermittent insecurities. During these periods the new teachers began to question the validity of their existing knowledge of individual pupils as they were presented with situations that undermined that which they had previously felt they understood. Jenny recorded a particular quandary in her reflective journal in response to ongoing displays of misbehaviour by one of her pupils:

I am becoming increasingly worried about Thomas. Academically he is very strong. But the child can't string two sentences together to speak to somebody nor does he seem in any way aware of himself. In class he has zero concentration no matter what I do – timers, quiet table, standing over him. I can't figure out whether he is just bold or if there is a problem of some sort. It's frustrating.

Jenny, Reflective Journal 2, Term 2

Pupils with special educational needs, newcomer pupils and occasionally Traveller pupils presented the novices with distinctive learning opportunities. Each of these pupils presented with a unique combination of abilities and needs, which in many instances existed outside the prior experience of the beginning teachers themselves, as confirmed by Lisa when she realised that one of her prospective pupils had a diagnosis of moderate general learning difficulties:

I felt a bit apprehensive especially because I have a special needs child in the classroom. I was a bit daunted by that. I hadn't done any courses or anything to prepare me and you're kind of thinking what am I going to do. Because you're kind of starting off from the beginning. I had got the school reports and I had looked through those but really they don't mean anything until you meet the child and you get to know her.

Lisa, Interview 1, Term 1

Coming to know and understand these pupils proved uniquely challenging as the new teachers attempted to be overtly sensitive to the learning cues provided in their interactions with and observations of these pupils. Initial trial-and-error attempts were gradually replaced with actions based on more considered reflection. While the ensuing learning activities did not always succeed in achieving their intended outcomes, the combination of increasing

experience, deliberation and confidence brought success and accomplishment with greater regularity.

5.3 Learning About School Context

In tandem with developing an understanding of their pupils, the study participants engaged in a learning process regarding their school context. As might be expected, day-to-day school procedures, such as those related to pupil supervision and the monitoring of pupil attendance, emerged strongly to the fore on their learning agenda in the early days and weeks. However, despite some initial orientation in most of the schools and the allocation of mentors in others, much learning about school procedures was realised in response to the occurrence of significant incidents, as David discovered:

I was on duty in the infant yard when it started to rain heavily. I was unsure of the fact that it was my call to decide if the children should go in or stay out! I only became aware of this when an SNA [special needs assistant] suggested to me that the children should be brought in. I then told everybody to go in but failed to firstly organise the children to get into lines and go in one line at a time. With the result, there was a rush for the door and some children got knocked over.

David, Reflective Journal 1, Term 1

The novices' attendance at staff meetings and planning days served as a useful vehicle by which their understanding of school context matters was enhanced. As each of the study participants' schools was partaking in the DEIS Action Plan for Educational Inclusion (Department of Education and Science, 2005a), a range of schoolwide initiatives to improve pupils'

achievement levels was being implemented. The level and intensity of activity ongoing in their schools was unanticipated by many of the novices and was initially perceived as being rather overwhelming, as attested to by Eoin following his attendance at his first staff meeting:

First staff meeting in school, didn't know what to expect. Realisation of the amount of work going on in the school and organisation that is needed. Realised how much I need to do to keep up with other teachers...Felt overwhelmed by the amount of things that are going on in the school and that I need to keep face with. Bit of a shock to the system, never been in a school with so much going on.

Eoin, Reflective Journal 1, Term 1

However, as time progressed and the early-career teachers became more familiar with the cut and thrust of their schools, so too grew their familiarity with their school's particular priorities for development and the manner in which they were to be achieved. In some schools the novices were facilitated to play a more active and collaborative role in the realisation of their school's priorities. For them, this development simultaneously brought them to a new level in their understanding of school-context issues and fostered a sense of ownership and collegiality. Elaine expressed her delight in becoming actively involved in her school's initiative to promote achievement levels in literacy:

This was the first time I had communicated on a professional level with all members of the staff...At first I felt slightly overwhelmed – I felt that the other/more experienced teachers knew best. I felt great when we decided my class would try out a buddy system for reading...It made me feel more of a team member and assisting in our way of helping the school as a whole.

Elaine, Reflective Journal 2, Term 2

The process of learning about school context was uniquely facilitated in the schools which operated formal mentoring systems. Such schools provided one-to-one support for novices as well as regular, after-school meetings that were attended by all mentors and mentees based in the school. In these settings a more developmental and differentiated approach was adopted in aiding the new teachers to understand the intricacies of their school context and to in turn apply that understanding in their day-to-day work in their classrooms. Issues pertinent to the novices' expressed needs were addressed regularly, including approaches to classroom management, engagement with parents, assessment, and provision for pupils with special educational needs. However, these meetings were also utilised productively by the mentors themselves to advance matters of whole-school importance.

A series of release days was provided for the teachers who were participating in the National Pilot Project on Teacher Induction (NPPTI). Individual inductees used some of this allocated time to meet directly with particular colleagues who fulfilled important roles in their schools but with which they were relatively unfamiliar. The opportunity to meet with members of the school's special education team and home/school/community liaison personnel in particular was reported as being especially beneficial. For the new teachers, such opportunities served to fill important lacunae in their understanding of the idiosyncratic nature of the school context in which they worked. It aided them to appreciate the importance of the interrelationships

between the roles and responsibilities of individual members of the school community. But most importantly, it helped them to begin to understand the importance of reflecting and realising their school's academic, social and emotional goals for pupils in their day-to-day practices in their classrooms.

5.4 Meeting the Demands of Planning and Preparation

Planning and preparation created considerable levels of apprehension among the early-career teachers, in particular the prospect that their plans would be scrutinised and evaluated by their assigned inspector for probation. At the outset of the school year, each of the new teachers attended a meeting in their local education centre at which the inspectors introduced guidelines to guide their planning and preparation. The usefulness of the advice given was variously rated by the newly qualified teachers. Some appreciated the freedom of not being presented with an overly prescribed approach to planning and preparation, while others craved increased structure and direction.

Many of the beginning teachers consulted friends and colleagues who had been relatively recently probated. They cross-examined them regarding approaches deemed successful and pored over the contents of their planning folders. They also sought solace and guidance from their fellow probationers in their respective schools. For each of the novices, these events set in train a process of dissecting curriculum documents, classroom

textbooks and a myriad of ancillary resources. As the newly qualified teachers reported, this interrogation was accompanied by a somewhat frantic process of constructing termly schemes and weekly plans. In a minority of schools, opportunities for engagement in collaborative planning and preparation with more experienced colleagues were provided and served to ease the pressure somewhat. For others, they floundered in relative isolation, lacking any real understanding of where the curriculum content being addressed in their particular class fitted in to the overall work of the school. For Sinéad, operating without reference to whole-school programmes proved particularly exasperating:

I feel that the fifth and sixth class teachers should be sitting down together, the curriculum books should be open and we should be deciding what we're going to do in fifth class and what they're going to do in sixth class. Instead I'm plodding along. I haven't a clue...Nobody knows what I'm doing. Nobody knows what the sixth class teacher is planning on doing next year. You're completely left to your own devices.

Sinéad, Interview 2, Term 1

The process of planning and preparation proved onerous and time consuming, most particularly during the first term. Nevertheless the majority of early-career teachers quickly got into their stride and with their termly schemes completed, the prospect of planning and preparing on a weekly basis proved significantly more manageable. However, for a small number of the novices meeting the requirements of planning and preparation proved particularly frustrating well into their first term. The difficulties encountered

centred primarily on ensuring that schemes of work were adequately focused on the learning outcomes to be achieved by pupils and sufficiently differentiated to accommodate the differing learning needs in their classrooms. Ensuring a balanced approach to curriculum implementation also proved problematic. For these teachers, the first visit of the inspector served as a useful steer in remedying their dilemma.

For a minority of the study participants, the requirements of probation and most particularly the prospect of an incidental inspection visit were the primary drivers for engaging in their current level of planning and preparation. They questioned the relevance of much of what they had personally recorded and confirmed that it was irregularly referred to by them in the course of their daily work. The achievement of particular milestones on the probation journey was in turn used as a catalyst to scale back on planning and preparation activity, as confirmed by David:

I know we got the mini dip like the fifth of December...That was kind of a cue now with the Christmas holidays coming up...English, Irish and maths, everything was covered but I found the SESE [social, environmental and scientific education] for them three weeks knowing that no one was going to come in the door, it moved from more resource-orientated to more you know, just kind of book.

David, Interview 4, Term 3

However, for most of the study participants engagement in high levels of planning and preparation, including the preparation of non-mandated daily notes, served to generate confidence and assurance in implementing their

intended lessons. They placed a high value on being organised, on being very clear in their own minds as to the direction their lessons would take and on the manner in which pupils' learning would be differentiated, resourced and consolidated.

5.5 Making Teaching and Learning Happen

Teaching and learning encompasses many elements including time management, the design and implementation of learning activities, provision for differentiation and the assessment of pupils' progress. For the beginning teachers who participated in this study, displays of interest in how their pupils learned and commitment to achieving high-level learning outcomes were in evidence from the outset of their first year in teaching.

5.5.1 Time Management and Curriculum Coverage

Despite minimum times for each curriculum area being centrally mandated (Government of Ireland, 1999), the task of formulating and implementing a timetable proved more daunting than had been initially anticipated. The difficulties experienced by the novices emanated from a number of sources but chief among them was the challenge to effectively manage their teaching time while also being in a position to accommodate the teaching-time requirements of a variety of special education teachers. The schools in which support teaching for pupils with special educational needs was structured on a solely withdrawal basis proved most problematic. In these

contexts, the new teachers found that their efforts to ensure all pupils' access to a broad and balanced curriculum were consistently thwarted. Timetables were regularly drawn and redrawn but with limited success.

In the initial weeks and months, the early-career teachers experienced regular dilemmas in pre-judging the amount of time that might be required to adequately address a particular topic or lesson. Frequently they found themselves running significantly over or under their self-allocated instructional time. This in turn created a snowball effect with regard to the realisation of the work planned for a particular day or week.

They regularly questioned the adequacy with which they attended to the needs of their diversity of learners during particular lessons. The pendulum frequently swung between a determination not to leave a topic until all pupils had acquired a competent understanding to the need to soldier on due to the pressures of time and the breadth of curriculum content to be addressed. For many of the novices, greater experience brought with it an increased confidence and inherent flexibility in managing instructional time more successfully. Such newly qualified teachers managed their time with greater ease and assurance as they progressed through their first year. They drew more regularly on opportunities to integrate pupils' learning across a variety of curriculum subjects and on purposeful incidental learning opportunities.

However, a minority of the new teachers continued to implement a rather restricted curriculum throughout their first year in teaching, with particular curriculum areas being irregularly or inadequately taught. Aspects of arts education, most particularly drama, as well as social, personal and health education were most commonly neglected completely or addressed in an unplanned or incidental manner. For some of the novices, the inadequate coverage of specific curriculum areas was directly related to their perceived level of competence and confidence in teaching them, as attested to by Sinéad:

I find the drama very hard just to stand there like, I find it, I hate it, the drama of all...The music is another one that really goads me. Anything to do with singing...I can't sing. My music talents are very limited. My drama talents are very limited. And therefore I find that I'm not teaching those the way I should be at all. I can't get in there.

Sinéad, Interview 3, Term 2

In contrast, the beginning teachers who possessed a particular interest in and/or capacity for specific areas of the curriculum taught those subjects with a clearly defined passion and enthusiasm. Eoin, who admitted that drama and SPHE were irregularly formally taught in his classroom gleaned particular personal satisfaction in teaching science due to his long-established interest in this area of the curriculum.

5.5.2 Designing and Implementing Engaging Lessons

The initial weeks and months of teaching were characterised by the new teachers' engagement in significant levels of trial and error in designing and implementing lessons. They variously road tested ideas presented in their pre-service programmes of education, lessons taught during previous periods of teaching practice, lessons designed in response to their pouring over the curriculum documents or engaging with same-grade teachers and fellow probationers, and lessons suggested by the various textbooks and workbooks sourced in their classrooms. Lesson preparation required significant levels of time, research and emotional energy. But despite this intensity of effort, a proportion of lessons in those early days failed to generate pupils' enthusiasm and realise the intended learning outcomes, as confirmed by Jenny:

Did a lesson on the story of 1. The class were so bored. Most of the class had been in preschool so they knew their numbers but how can I be sure they understand the oneness of one? The lesson was a disaster, we had an interactive game on the whiteboard and made sets of 1 but after the first go they had no interest.

Jenny, Reflective Journal 1, Term 1

With the passing of time, the process of lesson preparation and implementation adopted a more problem-solving orientation as the beginning teachers worked proactively to generate and sustain their pupils' interest by utilising their increasing knowledge and understanding of their charges' individual and collective interests. Fiona, who regularly experienced

classroom management challenges, found that when she structured lessons in a way that actively tapped into her pupils' interest, their enthusiasm for and participation in learning was limitless:

...through subjects that they are really interested in. Things that they had never heard of before...like, with history and all that, the stories and everything, they love all that...Doing the Romans, they loved that. "Why did they invent education, if they hadn't we wouldn't be at school now today" [imitating pupils' voices], you know this kind of thing. They're blaming the Romans basically. And baths, half of them hate to take a bath. The Romans were blamed for that as well.

Fiona, Interview 3, Term 2

The importance of ensuring the implementation of a diversity of teaching and learning approaches was a further lesson quickly learned by the novices. However, variety was not adopted by all of them to the same level of intensity due to the additional preparatory and delivery demands inherent in it. For the majority of study participants for whom a strong commitment to operationalise the learning principles of the primary school curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999) was in evidence, they reported drawing considerably on learning previously acquired in their pre-service programmes of education. They also noted a palpable and tangible development in their professional practice as they grappled with and made sense of the interface between what they already knew about good teaching and the diverse learning interests and needs that their cohort of pupils presented. David, in recording in his reflective journal, expressed both surprise and delight at his success in adopting an integrated approach to

addressing the theme of weather:

...today I saw for one of the first times the true benefit of integration, while its importance was always drilled into us [at college]. I used to always view it as a chore and it never seemed to work well in that it seemed to usually result in the rhythm of the lesson being broken up. However, today I saw how integration can benefit a lesson and enhance the learning of the children when done properly.

David, Reflective Journal 1, Term 1

Opportunities for pupils to operate as active agents in their own learning, to learn through guided activity and discovery, to learn through purposeful use of the environment and through integrated approaches to learning came more and more to the fore and were employed with increasing confidence and effectiveness over time. Growing belief in their abilities to devise and direct learning in their classrooms was accompanied by a greater propensity to take researched and calculated risks with their teaching. Reflection on prior teaching and learning encounters and armed with well thought-through and resourced plans of action, teaching approaches for many of the new teachers became progressively more complex and risqué. As the year progressed, their periodic interviews and reflective journals were increasingly speckled with accounts of lessons and initiatives that were successfully implemented. Kate's recounting of her introduction of a project-based approach to learning in history is reflective of the joy and affirmation enjoyed by her early-career peers as innovations in learning were successfully realised:

The projects were brilliant...Literally we did a little bit on the Aztecs and then I said "right we're going to do a project" [imitating own voice]. And they were like "oh my God it's like college, a project" [imitating pupils' voices]...They put their heart and soul into it and... were just brilliant. They loved each other's work...and they were all "oh look at this" and "where did you get this?" and "no, I didn't know that"... they weren't just piling it all together and never looking at it again.

Kate, Interview 2, Term 1

While many of the beginning teachers expressed disbelief at the varying achievement levels of their pupils, it did not prohibit them from regularly attempting to challenge pupils' thinking and to cultivate their problem-solving capacities. Eoin often used his own interest in science as a means of promoting higher-order thinking skills:

I was questioning them about how strong do you think the force of air is. We kind of built it up. "How could air, if you blew at a pin could you move it? If you blew at a book could you move that? What about a big stack of books, like no way could you move that" [imitating own voice]. I was challenging them just like we did in college. Let them come up with their own, see what their ideas are already and then let them experiment and discover for themselves rather than telling them.

Eoin, Interview 3, Term 2

With experience the novices came to increasingly appreciate the symbiotic relationship that existed between generating pupils' interest and realising positive pupil behaviour and engagement, as attested to by Róisín:

I think when you kind of have them all with you, when you're starting a lesson and there's something really good and they're all completely intrigued by it and want to get going and want to start on it...I had something on dinosaurs the other day and their amazement and just staring at the screen [interactive whiteboard]. There wasn't a sound, this was just really, really good. When they're so excited about starting a task they don't even want to mess. They just want to get started.

Róisín, Interview 2, Term 1

The beginning teachers became ever more attuned to the ebb and flow of pupils' interest and involvement. In earlier weeks and months, lessons would have been ostensibly implemented as planned. With increasing awareness of and sensitivity to pupils' attention levels, came a greater professional assuredness to change lesson tack or if necessary to move swiftly onwards to a different learning activity. Their growing comfort with their pupils and confidence in their interactions with them facilitated a greater tendency towards the injection of fun into teaching and learning encounters. The new teachers no longer felt endlessly concerned with the maintenance of order. By the year's end they saw themselves as beginning to emulate the traits they most admired in their more experienced colleagues, most notably the capacity to design and implement engaging learning encounters with relative speed and ease in tandem with the ability to enjoy light-hearted encounters with their pupils while continuing to experience their respect and admiration.

5.5.3 Collaborative Teaching and Learning

A majority of the beginning teachers experienced opportunities to work collaboratively with a member of the school's special education team in the

teaching of English and/or mathematics. However, the type and intensity of the collaborative endeavour varied significantly from one school setting to the next. In contexts in which the new teachers reported the greatest levels of success, positive working relationships were productively established with their team teachers. Their collaborative activity involved a genuine sharing of both the teaching endeavour and the provision of differentiated support for the pupils. In instances where team teaching operated effectively, the novices were facilitated to observe and interact with more experienced practitioners in a supportive, power-sharing environment. Learning goals were jointly established and realised, and ideas and resources were shared. Fiona found engagement in team teaching to be a particularly effective means of addressing the diversity of learning needs in her class:

If they're [pupils] not listening to me for two minutes Miriam will jump in and next minute they're listening to a different voice and then go back to me, over and back. Between us we'd have better, you know when there's two heads doing it, better ideas. We'd have all the plans and Miriam would have a lot of stuff down in resource that could be used up here as well.

Fiona, Interview 1, Term 1

In other instances collaborative teaching was restricted to the class teacher and support teacher teaching discrete content to particular groups of pupils within the same physical environment but with minimal interaction between the practitioners involved. While this approach served to alleviate some of the novice's workload, opportunities for genuine collaborative working and learning were rare. In a further small number of cases, efforts to engage in

collaborative teaching were discontinued due to its perceived ineffectiveness and the traditional system of withdrawing pupils with special educational needs was reintroduced.

Opportunities for pupils to participate in collaborative learning activities with their peers occurred with greater regularity. While a small minority of novices was propelled towards engagement in structured group work by the perceived expectations of inspection and probation, almost all of them judged it to be a fundamental aspect of their professional practice and worthy of development in its own right. Despite this intrinsic commitment, the establishment of effective group working involved engagement in a variety of trial-and-error approaches most particularly at the outset of the school year. Many of the early-career teachers reported that their pupils displayed a lack of experience of working collaboratively and as such the skills of working together had to be formally taught. As the year progressed, many of the beginning teachers regularly reported on particular incidences of effective collaborative working with such instances serving to boost their professional confidence.

For other study participants, displays of challenging and/or uncooperative behaviour by pupils served to dissuade them or markedly modify their planned intentions. Róisín, who expressed a strong commitment to the value of pupils working together, found that she regularly downsized to partner-

based activities as it proved a more feasible option in managing her pupils' behaviour and engagement:

I find group work hard...I find it hard to keep teaching the lesson and to get and keep them all on task because I'm always conscious of someone in the back of the classroom flicking pencils or you know that sort of thing. Even though you try to be everywhere, it's still very hard...I never seem to be overly happy with any of the group work...There's always a lot of fighting...I find myself doing pair work more often even though I plan to have group work it actually ends up just being pair work because I find it's just less mayhem.

Róisín, Interview 3, Term 2

The pupils' urge to be competitive also proved to be a two-edged sword for the new teachers. Where their competitive streak could be successfully harnessed, it resulted in raised levels of interest and effort. However, the existence of over-competitiveness resulted in bouts of bickering and squabbling and in some instances, the early termination of group-based activities.

5.5.4 Differentiation and Provision for Pupils With Special Educational Needs

In the course of the early weeks of their teaching careers, the beginning teachers became acutely aware of the very differing ability levels in their classrooms and this realisation was a cause of considerable surprise and alarm to them. While only two of the ten study participants taught in dual-class contexts, each of them quickly realised that the need for differentiation was strongly prevalent in their pupil cohort. For them, this requirement

differed very significantly from their previous encounters of teaching practice in which teaching to the middle ground was regularly found to suffice.

Efforts to differentiate teaching and learning experiences were almost always confined to the core curriculum areas of English and mathematics. The novices soon discovered that substantial levels of planning were a necessary prerequisite for the implementation of effective differentiation practices. As a result, they varied significantly in the extent to which such preparation and consequent execution were engaged in. Many of them demonstrated a keen awareness of and commitment to ensuring an appropriate instructional level for all their pupils. As a result, they engaged in the regular assessment of pupils' progress and in turn a variety of differentiation strategies was employed, including the establishment of instructional groups, and the differentiation of teaching and learning activities and resource materials. For others however, attempts at differentiation resulted in a simple lowering of the expectations of lesser able pupils as to the quantity of whole-class assigned work that would be completed by them in a given time period. In such contexts there was often a tendency to over-rely on the assigned special education teacher to ensure that curriculum provision for such pupils was being adequately addressed at an instructional level appropriate to their needs.

A common strategy that was regularly used by many of the beginning teachers was to present their lesson initially to the whole class and to then follow it up with more targeted work with specific pupils and/or with differentiated activities for the pupils to complete. Despite their best efforts, disappointments were regularly experienced as lessons and learning activities that were judged to have been well planned and resourced failed to achieve the intended learning outcomes for all pupils. While such setbacks were most commonly experienced at the outset of the school year, they did persist and occurred most regularly in instances where a lesser level of planned differentiation had been engaged in. The new teachers were quickly to learn that the demands for differentiation could not be assumed to be constant, in that difficulties in understanding and application were experienced by different pupils, to differing degrees on different occasions.

Addressing particular concepts with individual groups of pupils, whether planned for in advance or as a result of inadequate understanding mid-lesson, posed a distinct challenge for many of the novices. Each of them reported the difficulties they regularly experienced in keeping the remainder of their pupils productively on task while they attended to the learning needs of the pupils experiencing difficulties. This level of ongoing attention to their lower achieving pupils created a constant dilemma for the early-career teachers. They frequently vacillated between beliefs that they were spending too much or too little time with them, while also experiencing alternating

feelings of guilt in response to their perceived relative neglect of their more able pupils. For many of the novices, the incessant requirements to differentiate resulted in them experiencing high levels of dissatisfaction and an accompanying questioning of their professional competence.

Providing for pupils with formally diagnosed special educational needs manifested itself as a requirement to provide an even further elevated level of differentiation. For the new teachers, this dimension of their role resulted in them experiencing significant degrees of anxiety regarding the adequacy of their knowledge of the particular learning difficulties being experienced and in turn their ability to respond appropriately. This was intensely felt by Sinéad who was strongly of the view that her pre-service programme of education had inadequately prepared her for the demands of her current classroom:

I don't feel that I'm actually fully qualified or ready or prepared. I don't think I've a full understanding to go in and teach some of the difficulties that I'm coming up against. And I think for my own sake, even in a regular classroom, I need to know more...I just think we don't get enough training in special needs at all. I think it's the biggest problem area. Because they're all the kids that get lost. So many kids get lost in the system.

Sinéad, Interview 4, Term 3

The merits of initial teacher education aside, many of the early-career teachers regularly struggled with ensuring that their pupils with special educational needs successfully participated in the ongoing learning activities

in their classrooms. In some contexts, their purposeful participation with their peers was habitually thwarted by the level of severity of the special educational need. In such instances, the beginning teachers struggled to find a common ground where such pupils might work productively with their more able peers. In instances where the existence of a special educational need was accompanied by displays of challenging or defiant behaviour, this created an increased tension for the new teacher in ensuring successful participation.

With the progression of their first year, each of the novices experienced growth in their ability to increasingly respond in an appropriate manner to their pupils' differing abilities and needs. However, at the year's end, the capacity to effectively differentiate teaching and learning activities continued to be identified as a significant area of professional learning that required continued development.

5.5.5 Assessment of Pupils' Progress

The assessment of pupils' progress proved to be a challenging endeavour for almost all of the beginning teachers from the outset of their first year in teaching. Most of them were of the view that they lacked an adequate understanding of what and how to assess and in turn how to effectively utilise the outcomes of assessment activity. The views of the new teachers generally are usefully reflected in Lisa's interview comment:

The whole idea of assessment is a challenge. It's fine for actual tangible specific things that you're looking at, like the maths or the spellings. Teacher observation, I haven't really got my head around it properly, how do I actually do that. I do take notes on certain things and I write comments on logs and stuff like that. But at the same time, it's just really how to do it properly. It's how to approach that in the proper way. Even observing certain behaviours, that you're able to document and say how in the future could I address this because I'm very conscious of always trying to be positive and positively reinforce.

Lisa, Interview 1, Term 1

As a result, much of the assessment practice engaged in by the novices centred on measuring pupils' progress in the core curriculum areas of English and mathematics. Efforts to assess were overtly summative in nature, with manifestations of formative assessment approaches emerging only in tandem with increased levels of teacher experience. The assessment modes reported as being most commonly in use were teacher led in orientation and included teacher observation, teacher questioning and teacher-designed tasks and tests. However, the early-career teachers varied significantly in the extent to which they maintained records of pertinent observations of pupils' progress. A greater emphasis was placed by them on ensuring that pupils' completion of assigned tasks and tests was duly monitored and that their written activity was regularly corrected. The marking of pupils' written work, most particularly in the case of the beginning teachers of middle and senior classes, was completed following the conclusion of the school day. For them, minimal opportunity was found to be available to engage constructively with individual pupils as their work was in progress

due to the co-existing pressures of attending to the learning needs of their lesser able peers and the meeting of classroom management demands.

The maintenance of portfolios of pupils' work across a range of curriculum areas was a regular feature of the new teachers' practice. More often they reported them as constituting a somewhat random collection of individual pupils' work rather than particular pieces having been collaboratively selected by teacher and pupil as a representation of the achievement of agreed learning intentions. The prospect of the administration of the annual standardised assessment in English and mathematics constituted a cause of some concern. Anxieties were experienced by many of the novices regarding ensuring their correct administration and the subsequent interpretation of test results. The administration of standardised assessment also caused the beginning teachers to judge the results of these assessments as being a reflection on their competence and effectiveness as a teaching professional, as attested to by Elaine:

We did the Micra-Ts there last week and I have them corrected now...I suppose I was surprised with some of their results, some positives and some disappointments. You can't, like I was taking the results as a reflection on me and they'll be doing this test again in May and if there's not an improvement. I would take it a bit personally, I know I shouldn't but I still think like it's me that's teaching them.

Elaine, Interview 2, Term 1

Engagement in assessment practices that embodied a public-display dimension was generally a cause of greater levels of unease and was

attended to with increased assiduousness. A number of the schools in which the new teachers were employed issued mid-year written reports to parents on their children's progress. Again, this requirement was a cause of some distress to the novices as they struggled to provide evaluative comment on the progress of each individual pupil with regard to each area of the curriculum. Their concerns centred primarily on the finality and necessity for accuracy of the written word and, in some instances, their lack of adequate assessment evidence to support their evaluative judgements in non-core curriculum areas.

As the year progressed, a majority of the beginning teachers became more confident and proficient in their use of assessment modes to evaluate individual pupils' progress and to adjust their teaching accordingly. However, for the remainder a limited range of summative assessment approaches persisted with but a relatively tenuous link to teaching and learning activity. Despite this anomaly, each of the beginning teachers habitually shared experiences regarding their delight in their pupils' progress. Their individual and collective acquisition of concepts taught served to bolster the beginning teachers' belief in themselves as teachers and in their professional competence. Conversely, instances of perceived insufficient pupil understanding and unsatisfactory pupil progress were accompanied by bouts of professional insecurity and personal disappointment.

5.6 Learning to Manage the Classroom Effectively

On entering their first full-time classroom, the beginning teachers immediately got to work on organising the physical layout to meet their particular working requirements. Signs and symbols of previous incumbents were quickly banished, as they set about reorienting furniture, establishing areas of interest and putting their personalised stamp on their newly acquired environments. While engagement in these related activities was time consuming, they were achieved with relative ease.

With the arrival of the pupils themselves, attention promptly turned to the establishment of routines and practices to encourage their active engagement and to ensure that day-to-day operations ran relatively smoothly. The novices quickly realised that being a teacher with the full range of responsibilities for a class of pupils differed quite significantly from their previous experiences of teaching practice. On this occasion, there was no facility to revert to a more experienced practitioner should their early-career efforts go awry.

For some, the process of establishing classroom management practices proceeded with comparable ease. However, for many of the novices it proved to be significantly more challenging than initially anticipated. Management tasks that had been previously considered as being relatively easy to implement proved not to be so. Fiona, in tandem with a number of

her newly qualified colleagues found that the simplest of initiatives were regularly marred by disputes and pupil indifference:

Sometimes classroom management can be a nightmare even down to getting them to pick up their rubbish. When they're finished [their written work], I usually get them to put their copies into the middle so I can collect them then after. But a lot of the time, they don't listen to you doing this or they don't want to put the copy in the middle or they fight over whose copy goes on the top and things like that. "I want to be first" [imitating pupil's voice]. Trying to organise them at times is a nightmare. And they forget every day. Even the line, trying to get them into a line. At the start of the year I just had them single file which wasn't working. So I have them with partners now to see if it works a bit better. Sometimes it does.

Fiona, Interview 2, Term 1

During that early period, the beginning teachers who were experiencing classroom management challenges engaged in considerable levels of experimentation in an effort to address the situation. Their approaches included a diverse assortment from conveying expectations and communicating in a composed and measured voice to becoming more authoritative and administering sanctions. However, as many of the novices quickly found, engagement in trial-and-error approaches did not always achieve their intended outcomes and in some instances exacerbated a difficult situation further. David recalled an incident in which he admonished a pupil for inappropriate behaviour as his class was about to depart at the end of the school day:

I pulled him aside and challenged him over his behaviour. He responded with an arrogant attitude going so far as to say "that's fine" [imitating pupil's voice] when I threatened to take him to the principal. However, he continued with his behaviour and I didn't follow through on taking him down to the office. He continued to push the limits undermining my classroom management...I threatened the child with a punishment which I didn't follow through on then. When he realised that I wasn't willing to follow through on my discipline measures, he continued to act-up. I created a classroom atmosphere where the class saw that I wasn't willing to follow through.

David, Reflective Journal 1, Term 1

Some of the novices learned difficult personal lessons as they endeavoured to develop their professional competence. This learning process regularly occurred as they reflected on their own actions in the classroom while it was also occasionally prompted in response to feedback from parents. Elaine, who like her newly qualified colleagues felt a significant onus of responsibility on becoming a full-time teacher, struggled at the outset in striking an appropriate classroom management balance:

I was concerned about getting systems in place. I felt, I hate giving out, I really do and it makes me feel terrible in myself. But I knew that there was a certain amount that I had to do. One week it really just got to me. I said I feel like I'm just constantly giving out and I knew that that was affecting the children. I woke up with a brand new attitude but even the morning I had this brand new attitude that I'm going to do this and I'm going to do that, I had a parent in. She said her child was fretting coming in to school. It wasn't even that I was shouting at the children. Obviously I was just getting on to them. That just made me feel, oh my God, things have to change.

Elaine, Interview 1, Term 1

In spurring themselves into renewed action many of the novices drew on the expertise of school management, senior colleagues and mentors to assist

them in their efforts. However, hesitancy persisted among a minority for fear that professional inadequacies might be exposed.

Instances of pupil behaviour that failed significantly to meet the beginning teachers' desired standards regularly resulted in high levels of frustration and disappointment. For some of these teachers their professional composure was compromised. Eoin recalled a lesson in which his management was seriously undermined by the actions of one particular pupil. Following a number of failed attempts to bring the particular pupil back on track, Eoin flew into a rage:

And then I lost the head with him altogether. I never roared as much in my life like. I shut him up. I told him he wasn't coming down to any more science lessons, he wasn't coming back into my room with that kind of behaviour. You wouldn't roar at a cow like the way I did you know. But do you know it's not what you're supposed to do and I know it's probably not the most effective discipline but he did send down from his resource room. He did send down a note apologising for his behaviour and that it wouldn't happen again.

Eoin, Interview 4, Term 3

Despite intermittent challenges, the novices' capacity to manage their classrooms effectively grew with experience, reflection and the adoption of a more problem-solving orientation. Activities and aspects of the curriculum that were inclined to be shunned in those early weeks and months were no longer avoided, or certainly were not approached with the same degree of apprehension. All the beginning teachers introduced mechanisms to acknowledge and reinforce displays of positive behaviour by their pupils,

ranging from individual to group to class-based awards.

Notwithstanding the ongoing evolution of the beginning teachers' classroom management expertise, difficulties continued to be experienced by half of them in dealing with pupils who displayed particularly challenging behaviour. Such experiences were significantly more common in the all-boys' primary schools, most particularly in the case of boys in senior classes. Sinéad recounted a personally distressing encounter with one of her pupils following his return to school after a period of absence:

Well talk about a week of it. I never put in a week like it in my life. He basically came back and said "I can do what I want, I'm the boss" [imitating pupil's voice]...Monday he nearly drove me crazy. He kept threatening to run off and everything. Tuesday he was unreal. He was sitting in the chair swinging, talking, refusing to do any work whatsoever. Then he went and made a dash for the door. I got to the door in time to stop him. Up on the radiator to get out the windows upstairs. And he was going from one window to the other. I was like a loola running around the classroom. I went home that evening and I just thought I can't put in another day like today.

Sinéad, Interview 3, Term 2

While this account was extreme in nature, it was mirrored in severity by accounts from other novices dealing with similarly challenging pupils. The implementation of school and classroom-based interventions in some contexts served to temporarily alleviate the trauma and challenge being experienced. It allowed the beginning teachers to reorient their efforts to addressing the learning needs of their entire class and to achieve a degree of respite for themselves. However, such teachers remained permanently on

their guard for further outbursts as experience had taught them that periods of respite were often unnervingly short.

5.7 Developing the Capacity to be Reflective

Opportunities for the novices to engage in collaborative reflection with their more experienced colleagues were limited, even in the school contexts in which structured induction initiatives were operating. In instances where opportunities to observe more experienced colleagues at work were provided, they were not followed by engagement in formal, practice-based dialogue on the observation experience. The classroom practice of only one of the ten study participants was formally observed by a veteran colleague and collaborative reflection consequently engaged in, and this was initiated at the request of the novice herself. At best, collaborative reflection was confined to incidental conversations with team teachers or assigned mentors. In these situations, aspects of practice were discussed more so to meet the demands of expediency, than to delve into the new teacher's evolving beliefs and attitudes and to pose questions and seek solutions to professional practice quandaries.

The extent to which personally generated reflection on professional practice was engaged in was equally varied. The novices who possessed a more elaborated vision of what constituted good teaching and an accompanying well-developed conception of self-as-teacher displayed a stronger propensity

and capacity to engage in purposeful reflection on their practice. They articulated and demonstrated a natural and self-driven desire to be the best teachers that they could be. In their efforts to achieve this intrinsically generated goal, they consistently questioned and interrogated their practice and sought new ways of being and working in their classrooms. For the teachers for whom the emergence of their professional self was less well developed and for whom the realisation of a career in primary teaching was not comparably as long established or earnest, the motivation to and practice of more in-depth reflection was sporadic. Occurrences in the classroom were regularly taken at face value. They were responded to in a manner that served to maintain the integrity of the teacher, to preserve the status quo and to respond pragmatically to the situation that had arisen. In such contexts, engagement in more profound reflection, accompanied by a consequential shift in teacher beliefs and actions, was more likely to transpire in response to the occurrence of a high-level critical incident or a possible threat to the public image of the new teacher.

As part of the research design, the study participants regularly recorded accounts of critical incidents that had occurred in their classrooms and schools. They subsequently engaged in analysis of and reflection on these events. For a minority, the completion of their reflective journal was undertaken solely to aid the researcher in her work. For others however, the provision of a structured stimulus to engage in personally generated

reflection on a recent event was described as inducing a positive learning experience. The necessity to move beyond a simple recalling of the account itself to a consideration of the role of the new teacher, and the learning and restructuring of beliefs that might ensue, proved to be professionally empowering. Róisín experienced a period in her first term where the teaching of physical education was proving particularly problematic. She recorded a series of entries in her reflective journal and in her final entry on this matter, she recorded the following:

The lesson went smoothly in the PE [physical education] hall today...I think if I was not writing in this journal I may never have thought about their behaviour in the PE hall as much. I would have just tried to calm them down or continued to ask them to sit out. But because of the journal, it forced me to think about my actions and their actions. I am delighted I did as it really has helped me.

Róisín, Reflective Journal 1, Term 1

Opportunities to reflect on their emerging professional practice were also provided for in the context of the periodic interviews. The interviews confirmed the early-career teachers' emerging capacity to constructively reflect on their practice. The vocalisation and sharing of pertinent experiences prompted a more intensive level of thought and reflection. It provided both time and physical space for them to enunciate their heartfelt thoughts, to question their own assumptions and practices and to evolve additional personal and professional insights into their work.

5.8 The Provision of Induction Supports to Aid Professional Learning

Two of the five schools in which the study participants were based were participating for the first time in the National Pilot Project on Teacher Induction (NPPTI). A third school was implementing a system of induction generated from within its own resources. The remaining two schools had no formal induction processes in place. On first arrival in their schools, each of the beginning teachers possessed multiple queries regarding teaching and learning practices in their schools. They displayed particular concern that key aspects of their role as teachers might be inappropriately addressed by them or inadvertently overlooked. Orientation practices to address these matters varied widely. Unsurprisingly, the schools that had opted to implement formal induction initiatives attended significantly more perceptively to the needs of their newly appointed teachers. In the other two schools, the novices came to understand the teaching and learning practices in their schools more through a combination of personal initiative and chance.

Feelings of isolation and of being left to one's own devices were strongly experienced by the new teachers for whom no structured induction support was provided. While each of them was incrementally successful in developing their professional competence, it occurred in relative isolation of the experience and expertise of their veteran colleagues. The views

expressed by Lisa regarding this absence are strongly reflective of her early-career peers whose induction was similarly unsupported:

There's no support available here in the school...I'm just finding things out as I'm going along and sometimes after the event...Sometimes you kind of feel that you're being told that you're doing something wrong but you've never been told the right way...everyone is on their own. There's no structure there to say "these are the newly qualified teachers, you take them under your wing, you make sure they know everything". I would have loved to have had a designated mentor. Somebody to direct and somebody that you can turn to with a problem or an issue, that you can ask for advice.

Lisa, Interview 2, Term 1

Designated mentors were formally appointed to the four study participants whose schools were participating in the NPPTI. The early-career teachers unanimously confirmed that the assignment of a mentor contributed very positively to their socialisation into their new school community and to the development of their professional practice. The primary means by which professional growth was achieved was through the mentors' provision of advice, guidance and support. Discussions centred on a range of pertinent school matters, both curricular and organisational, with the content of mentoring encounters being contributed to by mentors and mentees alike.

Informal induction support from teaching colleagues was deemed by almost all the novices to have been an important source of guidance and direction and in turn a positive contributor to their professional learning. For these new teachers, increasing experience of their schools and the differing teaching

personalities within them led to their establishment of productive advisory relationships with particular teaching colleagues. Most often, they were experienced colleagues who were presently teaching or who had recently taught the same grade. Such relationships were almost always at the instigation of the new teacher but were continually responded to with a generous sharing of experience and expertise. Such veteran colleagues were considered by the novices to be fonts of tremendous knowledge, skill and wisdom, as attested to by Róisín:

I'm constantly asking Eileen "did you teach this?" or saying to Una "what was this like or how did you go about this?"...It's kind of like a walking, talking internet sort of thing. They're very helpful and I suppose they're at it for so long that it just comes naturally.

Róisín, Interview 3, Term 2

The operation of grade-based teams in which teachers teaching the same age groupings regularly met to plan, to share ideas and difficulties being encountered, and to discuss areas of practice occurred most commonly in the schools in which formal induction systems operated. From the beginning teachers' perspective, such meetings were simultaneously judged as being an important source of learning and reassurance, as reported by Kate in her reflective journal:

Today we had a planning meeting with myself and all the other class teachers [same-grade]. These meetings usually take place once a month and are a great way to increase collaboration. These meetings are of great benefit for NQTs as it lets one know that he/she is on the right track. It also allows teachers to share ideas, teaching methods and resources as well as discussing homework, queries etc. I feel these meetings are extremely beneficial to NQTs in general as they may have never taught this class level before and it allows them to be open regarding any questions they may have.

Kate, Reflective Journal 3, Term 3

For the early-career teachers in the other schools, no formal system of regular and structured teamwork had been established resulting in the novices relying more heavily on brief informal encounters or as occurred in one school context, the total absence of any form of collaboration.

Opportunities to observe experienced colleagues at work were restricted to the schools participating in the NPPTI. However, the new teachers in the other schools had some opportunities to engage in the observation of experienced practitioners who demonstrated lessons as part of a range of initiatives under the Primary Curriculum Support Programme. For the former group of teachers, the provision of opportunities to observe experienced colleagues at work was judged as being one of the most beneficial elements of their school's participation in the NPPTI. In selecting their observation sites, the novices consulted with their mentors and particular attention was afforded to the provision of observation opportunities in similar-grade classes and in areas of the curriculum that individual beginning teachers found particularly challenging. Each of the novices reported that aspects of what

they had experienced during their observation sessions had been implemented successfully in their own classrooms at a later point.

Despite their keen enthusiasm to observe their more experienced colleagues, none of the NPPTI participants opted to engage in structured observation of and feedback on their own practice. Observation of their practice was confined to informal observation and discussion in the context of collaborative teaching initiatives in their classrooms. Róisín, whose school operated its own system of induction, was the only study participant who requested structured observation and feedback. She had identified the teaching of reading as an area of her practice that she wished to develop and she in turn accessed the professional guidance of a veteran colleague who was both an experienced mainstream practitioner and a special education teacher.

Dependence on fellow probationers for both professional and moral support was a feature of the first-year experiences of each of the novices. Through the establishment of close friendships, the trials and tribulations of the first year in teaching were exchanged. The relationships formed served as a mechanism for the ongoing sharing of ideas and challenges, resources and materials. The NPPTI participants also had access to a wider network of support in the form of regionally structured professional development days which were facilitated by expert teaching professionals. These meetings

were judged by them to be most beneficial as they brought to the fore, in a realistic and pertinent manner, the interface between the theory gleaned in college and the practicalities of their present classrooms. They sparked in the new teachers an elevated level of reflection and prompted a new trajectory of learning and practice. For David, it brought about a realisation that his learning about and capacity to address the requirements of differentiation were not complete:

I found today to be very beneficial as it raised many questions which I had not given much thought to before. Prior to this I felt that I had a solid grasp of differentiation as we had covered the concept thoroughly in college and I was putting it into practice everyday. However today new ideas and different methods of implementing it were highlighted to us, many of which seemed to work very well. This highlighted to me that as a teacher, you are constantly developing your practice and there is always more that you can learn.

David, Reflective Journal 2, Term 2

While a number of the beginning teachers expressed an interest in attending a variety of professional development courses provided by their local education centre, the demands of their first year in teaching were seen to militate against the availability of sufficient time for engagement in such endeavours.

5.9 Professional Learning and the Co-occurrence of Probation

Each of the beginning teachers who participated in this study was eligible for probation (Department of Education and Science, 2006). This prospect was responded to with varying levels of apprehension by the study participants.

For some it embodied high levels of worry that lasted throughout their entire first year in teaching, whereas for others anxiety levels were significantly lower. For many of the study participants, waves of heightened apprehension were experienced periodically in response to the prospect and/or occurrence of actual inspection visits.

The beginning teachers strongly shared a common desire to ensure that their perceived expectations regarding what their inspector wanted on visiting their classroom was readily available. Perceived expectations regarding planning and assessment occupied their thoughts and actions most forcibly and constituted the topic for regular discussion with fellow probationers and other colleagues and friends who had recently successfully completed the probation process.

The occurrence of the first incidental inspection visit served as a significant milestone. It provided each probationer with an opportunity to meet with their assigned inspector, to demonstrate their evolving professional practice and to receive feedback on their work. For almost all the new teachers, this first visit was experienced as being encouraging and affirming. Oral feedback from their inspectors was taken in good stead. It was considered to be constructive as it highlighted areas of practice that required attention or aspects that could be developed further. The novices expressed a combination of delight and relief having received confirmation that all was

progressing well in tandem with a commitment to implementing the advice received, as confirmed by Maria:

It was nice to know that you're going the right way and that your plans are done properly and that you're teaching properly. It's good like. He gave me a couple of recommendations...I thought it was great to get the feedback because to know where to change. When you're learning yourself you want to know these things so I really took on board what he said.

Maria, Interview 2, Term 1

Many of the new teachers stressed the importance to them of having the opportunity to engage in dialogue with their inspector and to discuss in detail the specific recommendations being made. They also welcomed inspectors acknowledging their successful implementation of the advice given in the course of subsequent visits.

Of the group of ten, Lisa expressed having mixed feelings about her first inspection visit. Scope for development was identified in aspects of her planning and practice. While she was accepting of the feedback given and resolute in her determination to address the matters raised, the manner in which her lessons had transpired and the presence of two inspectors was the cause of some distress to her:

...there were actually two inspectors. It was quite intimidating from that point of view...even in the feedback session there's two people giving you feedback. And that was quite hard to take in, in the sense that you're sitting there and you're a little bit overwhelmed by it. At the same time there is no other way of doing it and you've got to sort of digest it as much as you can. There's a lot in it to digest in your first visit. But I suppose the way I looked at it was, if I take it on board now I know that I'll be able to deal with it. So from that point of view I didn't mind.

Lisa, Interview 2, Term 1

Mid-way through the first year, each of the novices experienced a second visit from their assigned inspector and in response an interim inspection report was completed signifying for them their successful reaching of the halfway point in the probation process. For some of the study participants, most particularly David and Eoin, the successful completion of the "mini dip" was considered more significant than the general inspection itself. They were of the view that as the interim inspection was a non-notified visit, there was a greater possibility of events going awry than on the notified general inspection visit.

The return to school for the final term and the prospect of the general inspection caused anxiety levels among many of the novices to again increase considerably. For Fiona, her final term was filled with multiple demands as she recorded in her reflective journal:

First day back. I was feeling more confident until I thought about everything that was coming up – First Confession, Holy Communion and the ever-dreaded dip. My mind is spinning with everything. Sometimes I feel I cannot remember everything or even the smallest thing as my head is packed with so much. I just hope this term gets better.

Fiona, Reflective Journal 3, Term 3

Significant levels of preparation were engaged in by all the beginning teachers in preparation for their general inspection. Planning and assessment folders were meticulously scrutinised, themed lesson planning was painstakingly undertaken, classrooms were spruced up and a plethora of material resources was placed at close hand. Certain topics were revisited with the pupils while avoiding overexposure to the planned lesson content for fear of undermining the novelty factor. Nothing that could be addressed in advance of the day was left to chance. Despite the level of time and energy expended in preparing for the general inspection, many of the new teachers continued to experience anxieties. For those for whom discipline continued to prove challenging, their concerns centred on their ability to maintain an adequate level of appropriate behaviour and order for an entire school day. For those who had succeeded in developing their professional practice to an elevated level, their concerns centred on their ability to effectively display the breadth of their competence within the time confines of a single day. Whatever the nature and magnitude of the concern, it was intensely felt by each early-career teacher in the days and hours leading up to their general inspection.

Once the general inspection formally commenced, most apprehensions quickly dissipated for the majority of new teachers. Some ongoing pressures however were reported in ensuring that a maximum number of curriculum areas were addressed while also adequately attending to the development of individual lessons. Continual feedback from the inspector during the course of the day was reported to banish any lingering anxieties and to affirm the ongoing efforts of the beginning teachers. Elaine's interview comment is typical of many of her fellow probationers:

Pádraig couldn't have been any more positive. After every lesson he said "that was great, well done, move on whenever you're ready" [imitating inspector's voice]. The feedback really relaxed me I have to say. After looking around and talking to the children he said "you did really well, well done, I'm very impressed". I found he was being genuine as well which helped an awful lot.

Elaine, Interview 4, Term 3

For each of the new teachers, the general inspection was successfully completed with only a few minor glitches being experienced by some on the day. The achievement of fully qualified status was realised with a mixture of relief, exhaustion and elation. The beginning teachers' individual and collective achievements were variously celebrated with their school colleagues, their families and beyond. The successful completion of probation marked the culmination of a demanding and in many respects frenzied year, in which a cohort of ten beginning teachers strove to realise their ambitions to become competent and effective teaching professionals.

For many of them, the achievement of their final goal prompted reflection on the journey travelled:

The dip is done, I am so happy and emotional, I don't know whether to laugh or cry...What a relief, I cannot believe that I am sitting here mid May, with my dip day successfully done. There were days when I really thought I wouldn't get this far, when I felt like giving up, when I felt completely out of my depth and yet here I am.

Sinéad, Reflective Journal 3, Term 3

5.10 Conclusion

On encountering their cohort of pupils, each of the beginning teachers was forcibly struck by the diversity of their backgrounds and achievement levels. Increased understanding of pupils' familial circumstances resulted in a minority of novices forming negative characterisations of some pupils and their families (Achinstein & Barrett, 2004), while for the majority their greater appreciation of some pupils' challenging circumstance resulted in the formation of stronger emotional connections with them. As Csikszentmihalyi and Larson (1984) and Intrator (2003) advocate, each of the new teachers progressively used their knowledge and understanding of their pupils in planning and implementing lessons that increasingly successfully generated their interest in and enthusiasm for learning.

The process of learning about pupils was accompanied by a growing familiarisation with a breadth of school-context matters. Each of the early-career teachers was awestruck by the degree of whole-school interventions

being implemented in their respective schools in response to their participation in the DEIS Action Plan for Educational Inclusion (Department of Education and Science, 2005a). The novices who commenced their careers in schools in which nationally or locally devised induction initiatives were being implemented experienced significantly greater assistance in acquiring a more comprehensive understanding of school priorities and how the work they undertook in their classrooms contributed to the realisation of espoused goals.

The beginning teachers in this study, as in the case of the Killeavy and Murphy (2005) inquiry in the Irish context, construed engagement in planning and preparation as being onerous and demanding, and inherently bound up with the process of probation. With increased time and experience, the implementation of planned lessons was characterised by a marked shift from intermittently successful trial-and-error approaches to the utilisation of more complex pedagogical problem solving. This coincided with their growing awareness of the relationship between instruction and classroom management as stressed by Feiman-Nemser (2001b) and their increasing perceptiveness and capacity to respond to moment-to-moment shifts in pupils' interest and engagement. However, the practice of a minority of the novices was repeatedly characterised by the non-implementation of the full range of curriculum areas due to their stated exigencies of time management

or a lack of confidence in their professional competence regarding particular subjects.

The new teachers' self-assessed competence played a seminal part in the manner in which they perceived and enacted particular aspects of their role. The related areas of pupil assessment and curriculum differentiation proved consistently challenging, most particularly in responding to the need for mixed-ability teaching and in providing for pupils with special educational needs. A further analysis of the evolution of professional practice confirmed a stronger commitment to the employment of more ambitious and elaborate teaching approaches among those beginning teachers who possessed a clearer vision of good teaching and a more advanced conception of themselves as teachers. These novices also displayed a greater capacity to reflect on their professional practice and to rehearse (Featherstone, 1993) and purposefully utilise in their current context, theory that had previously been presented at pre-service level.

For many of the early-career teachers the establishment of classroom management practices and routines proved significantly more demanding than they had anticipated. Their novice status, most particularly in the early stages of the first year, made it more difficult for them to adequately frame (Achinstein & Barrett, 2004) manifestations of misbehaviour and it resulted in instances of ineffective and disproportionate responses to indiscretions as

well as a concomitant diminution of professional self-confidence. Difficulties with classroom management continued to be experienced by half of the new teachers throughout their first year and such challenges were significantly more commonly experienced in the all-boys' primary schools.

A wide variation was found to exist in the induction experiences of the study participants. Those who were appointed in schools that had introduced the NPPTI project or that were implementing a school-generated induction initiative experienced much higher levels of professional support from designated mentors, same-grade teams and wider school colleagues, whereas their fellow new teachers in the other schools experienced relative isolation. While opportunities to engage in the observation of veteran practitioners were warmly welcomed and identified as a major professional support, only one of the ten novices experienced structured observation by and feedback on their practice from a more experienced colleague. The co-occurring process of probation was a source of considerable apprehension for almost all the study participants. Anxiety levels waned for most of them in response to the completion of successive inspection visits. Ultimately, the achievement of fully-qualified status at the conclusion of the first year in teaching was collectively greeted with enormous relief and feelings of professional validation.

CHAPTER 6

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY: SELF-AS-TEACHER

6.1 Introduction

Early-career teachers enter their first teaching positions with diversely developed conceptions of the teacher they wish to become. This chapter examines the manner in which the early conceptions of the study participants evolved over the course of their first year. It explores the intensive moulding of teacher identity that occurred in response to the interface with their schools' established cultures and the growth of their relationships with pupils, colleagues and parents alike. It culminates in an analysis of the facets of self-as-teacher that predominated as the new teachers concluded their first year in teaching.

6.2 Early Conceptions of Self-as-Teacher

The ten beginning teachers who participated in this study demonstrated the capacity to articulate the type of teacher they wished to become. The two most prominent facets of their early conceptions of self-as-teacher were the ability to manage pupils effectively and to develop meaningful relationships with them. In many instances these two components of the evolving professional self happily co-existed in the new teachers' espoused identities. For others, however, the balance for prominence tipped more significantly in the direction of pupil management or relationships with them.

Both Maria and Lisa expressed the strongest desire to be effective classroom managers. They were strongly of the view that it was important for them as newly qualified teachers to communicate assertively to their pupils that they were in control. This ambition was also driven by their equating of good classroom management with the achievement of curriculum coverage and high work outputs from pupils. Lisa verbalised her emerging teacher identity as follows:

Firm with the children, letting them know that you're the boss and they know they have to do what they're told when they're told...you cannot afford to be laid back about things. You have to move them on and that's where being firm and letting them know...You're not just there to go through the day, go through the motions, that's not just the way it's going to be. It's that we're going to do this the best that we can.

Lisa, Interview 1, Term 1

In contrast, Fiona and Róisín strongly foregrounded the importance of developing relationships with pupils, of "being there" for them and "working with" them. Jenny's views readily encapsulated the perspectives of her beginning teacher colleagues who simultaneously juggled the desire to be a good classroom manager with that of developing quality relationships with pupils. Her reflection on her more experienced teaching colleagues helped to shape her conception of self-as-teacher. Central to this vision was the successful walking of a perceived tightrope between teacher as manager and teacher as relationship builder:

I suppose I want to be with experience, to be able to deal with all sorts like and to have the children respect me and like me for a start. I don't want to be feared or anything like that. I want them to like me but at the same time I'm the teacher and the boss. I see it with the older teachers. They'll have a laugh and a joke with the kids but then they know you don't cross that line. You're still the boss.

Jenny, Interview 1, Term 1

A third common feature among the responses of many of the beginning teachers was a desire to develop the capacity to make learning exciting and engaging for pupils, most particularly through tapping into areas of particular interest to them. The successful generation of pupils' enthusiasm for learning was ultimately seen as a means of cultivating a positive attitude to and progression in learning, while also serving to minimise classroom management difficulties. However, the challenge for the new teacher of simultaneously achieving such high-level goals was strongly felt by Kate:

I really just want to be fun, to be interesting. I want group work...And you know, fun things that they're going to enjoy and be interested in like, science and SESE [social, environmental and scientific education], stuff like that...Kind of relaxed but also very fair. To keep the balance you know, you can't let them, you know if you're too nice they might kind of overstep the border as well. Just to be nice, to be approachable, to be fun, to be interesting. It's hard to do it all the time, to get it all, but hopefully everything will come together.

Kate, Interview 1, Term 1

The first few weeks in teaching not only served to confirm many of the values and beliefs that the novices brought to their newly entered career, but they also served to highlight aspects of their role that were ripe for development.

6.3 The Importance of School Culture

The significance afforded to school culture and the extent to which cultural aspects were reflected in interviews and journal entries were directly related to how positively or negatively school culture was experienced by the individual beginning teachers. Negative experiences of school culture were much more regularly and prominently reported.

A majority of the school contexts were judged to be open and actively supportive of the early-career teachers, though the intensity of openness and support did vary from one school setting to another. In these schools, the new teachers experienced a relatively smoother transition into their newly acquired positions. In some of the schools, support was initiated by a wide range of support givers. In others, support was more inclined to be forthcoming in response to direct requests from the beginning teachers themselves.

Open and collaborative school cultures were not a one-way street of support provision. They also contained inherent demands of the beginning teachers themselves. In the schools in which sharing and team working operated at a particularly elevated level, the newly qualified teachers had to be willing to open their classroom doors and to an extent lay themselves bare. In Jenny's school, collaboration had been developed to a high level and she in turn displayed a keen awareness of the accompanying expectations:

I think in this school particularly you have to be willing to work with other people. I mean you can't just hold yourself into the classroom and do what you want. We all plan together, we all make decisions together...If you're not willing to have someone come in and see what you're doing in your classroom, there's no point in coming here.

Jenny, Interview 4, Term 3

Four of the ten study participants experienced school cultures that they considered did not meet their expectations and needs. In the main such school cultures were characterised by an absence of openness and team working. Teachers worked individually in their classrooms and without reference to other teaching colleagues or whole-school practices. Like the other beginning teachers in such contexts, Lisa sought to understand why such a closed school culture prevailed:

I'm very interested in learning more and being the best teacher I can so I want to be in a school where I'll be able to do that. Being able to offer stuff that I've learned as well and being able to work on teams on different initiatives. If you're working in a school where that doesn't happen you could get disenchanted with it to a certain extent. People work very independently here...I don't know why it is really. I don't know what the cause of it is. I don't think it's any individual thing but it's just not happening.

Lisa, Interview 3, Term 2

This absence of cohesion resulted in the novices experiencing an increased sense of isolation in their classrooms, in particular due to the absence of opportunities for team teaching through which they perceived they could observe more experienced colleagues at work. This frustration with the underutilisation of teachers' expertise for the shared benefit of colleagues and pupils was strongly echoed by Sinéad as she grappled to develop her

professional expertise:

We need to work together more as a staff...I think we need to be helping each other more, we need to be pulling together and getting ideas off each other. There's no point in somebody just having all these really good ideas in the classroom keeping them to themselves and the rest of us struggling with the bit of music or whatever.

Sinéad, Interview 4, Term 3

The absence of a collaborative culture resulted in the beginning teachers having to go it alone in making decisions on matters that were of importance to them. The nature of these decisions varied but in many instances they were accompanied by a lack of assuredness on the novice's part due to the absence of input from more experienced colleagues and the opportunity to consider the issue as a staff team.

Concern was also expressed by the beginning teachers as they unearthed practices and protocols in their schools that clashed with their personally held ideals and beliefs. Sinéad recalled an incident of serious bullying of a pupil in her class. While the principal did speak to the pupils concerned, no formal sanction was administered. In her view, this was a direct result of the fact that the perpetrators were from the "good families" in the class, as opposed to the pupils who were more usually in trouble. Elaine also experienced overt divergence with the views and practices of her more experienced colleagues in the special education team as she sought to

assert her authority in deciding on the more appropriate programme of learning for a pupil in her class:

I felt that they were basically, like they didn't ever say it to me, but I felt they were saying "look we're here for x number of years, what would you know, you're here for three weeks. Take it from us, she's not able to do this" [imitating colleagues' voices]. In the end I kind of said "right okay I'll do it"...and then I said "no, I'm going to try it my way. I'm going to stay with it" [imitating own voice]. And I went back and I told them [of the positive outcome]. And they were like "she didn't do that, someone helped her"...It was tough that way. And I don't want to be to them either, "look it, I know I'm right". But just from my experience of being with her all day long, I just felt that expectations needed to be raised and that she could do a lot more.

Elaine, Interview 1, Term 1

In one school context, staff relations had degenerated significantly due to the existence of open conflict between some staff members. While the two beginning teachers in this school played no direct role in the discord, both found it distressing and it impacted negatively on their willingness to interact with colleagues generally. Overall, negative experiences of school culture served to thwart opportunities for professional and personal development and to increase the novices' feelings of isolation and frustration.

6.4 The Development of Relationships With Pupils

The formation of sensitive and caring relationships with pupils and the reciprocation of these relationships were significant contributors to the beginning teachers' sense of self-as-teacher. Many of them erred on the side of caution in their early relationships with pupils for fear that letting down

their relationship guard would somehow open the floodgate of classroom management and behavioural difficulties. As the school year progressed, relationships became deeper and stronger, but were still not immune to occasional challenges and rude awakenings.

6.4.1 A Commitment to Caring

The adoption of a caring attitude to pupils and the cultivation of their happiness while at school were judged by a significant majority of the novices as being particularly important aspects of their role as teacher. It provided for them a sense of personal and professional fulfilment, a sense that they were "making a difference" in the lives of their pupils and that the time spent by pupils at school was a happy experience due to the efforts and interventions of their teachers.

Displays of elevated care and concern were regularly extended to individual pupils when personal traumas were being experienced by them. In such instances, the beginning teachers' interactions with these pupils operated in excess of their usual displays of attention in an effort to address the particular concerns being faced. A pupil in Kate's class experienced a temporary care placement due to an abusive home environment. On her return to school some weeks later, Kate sought to provide additional care and support:

I was extremely worried and felt very sad when I heard what had happened...When she arrived back in school on Monday I was so happy to see her...I was aware since September of the harsh family situation and so always ensure that she is happy and content in school providing her with lots of praise to boost her confidence. I have been keeping a very close eye on her all week...I told her that I am here for her one hundred per cent and that if she ever feels sad about anything that she can talk to me about it.

Kate, Reflective Journal 3, Term 3

6.4.2 Counteracting the Impact of Socio-economic Disadvantage

Some of the study participants judged that they made very particular efforts to ensure that their pupils' experience at school was an enjoyable one due to the disparate home backgrounds from which the pupils came. Róisín was particularly cognisant of the teacher qualities and classroom conditions necessary for the creation of a safe and supportive environment:

I think first of all you have to be somebody that the children can approach. They have to be able to trust you and to understand you. Because of the school I'm working in the children have to want to come to school and enjoy school. You have to make them feel it's a nice place to be with routine and structure...God only knows what kind of atmosphere they've come from at home or what's been happening at home...It really does help if they talk about it because they might have nobody else to talk to about it. As well all boys, they don't talk about things and unless you encourage them they don't want to.

Róisín, Interview 4, Term 3

Some teachers made particular allowances for their less advantaged pupils and judged that this adopted approach would serve as a means of sustaining a positive attitude to schooling. For other study participants, the formation of caring relationships with pupils from less advantaged communities was seen

as a mechanism to communicate expectations and in turn to generate intrinsic motivation.

6.4.3 The Reciprocation of Relationships

The relationships formed by the beginning teachers with their pupils were not solely at the instigation of the novices themselves. Reciprocated bonds were reported by all the early-career teachers as they progressed in their first year of teaching. This process was aided by them getting to know their pupils more intimately and through coming to appreciate their individual interests, strengths and needs. Relationships also evolved productively as the new teachers became more confident and self-assured in their roles. In particular, they enjoyed opportunities to engage in general banter with their pupils and to generate and experience a sense of fun in the classroom. While in some instances, this resulted in a tipping of the classroom management balance in favour of the pupils, the beginning teachers felt increasingly confident in redressing this situation as necessitated.

This strengthening of two-way bonds impacted positively on the quality and openness of the beginning teachers' relationships with their pupils in many instances. It resulted in the novices being more candid and unguarded in their engagements. This cementing of relationships with pupils also served to enhance the effectiveness of teaching and learning, as the pupils responded to their teachers' expressions of honesty and sincerity. Kate

experienced considerable trepidation in planning for the implementation of the more sensitive areas of the relationships and sexuality education programme with her pupils. Despite this apprehension, she delivered the programme elements in their entirety to all her pupils simultaneously and felt strongly validated by the outcomes of this experience:

I feel that like, with any class you can have a really, really good relationship with them or you can kind of hold back and be the teacher that nobody comes to for support...on Monday I did the RSE [relationships and sexuality education] lesson and they were so open about it...And then I told them to talk about how they felt afterwards and loads of them were saying "well I feel relief and I feel really happy now that I know that this is normal" [imitating pupils' voices]...And then loads of them came up and were asking questions to me afterwards which was really nice because I was delighted that they could feel open enough to come up and ask me about things like that.

Kate, Interview 4, Term 3

Pupil-initiated displays of support and affection for their beginning teachers served as a significant support for them as persons and emerging professionals. While Eoin regularly experienced challenging days with his pupils, he was quite overwhelmed by their responses on realising that it was his birthday:

It was my birthday there last week...David [fellow probationer] must have said it to my mentor or something...And the next thing one of the loudest, most chattiest girls in it [the class], she couldn't keep a secret. "It's teacher's birthday, it's teacher's birthday" [imitating pupil's voice]. It spread like wildfire. So they all sang happy birthday when I came in and they gave me a load of soccer cards.

Eoin, Interview 2, Term 1

6.4.4 The Occurrence of Challenging Relationships

Despite the general trend towards the development of caring and reciprocated relationships with pupils, most of the beginning teachers experienced challenges in their relationships with some of their pupils during their first year of teaching. The level of challenge was most pronounced for the beginning teachers who taught in primary schools attended solely by boys, but it was not confined to them. The existence of overtly and continually challenging rapport was restricted to a relatively small number of teacher-pupil relationships and it often coincided with the existence of emotional and/or behavioural difficulties in the pupils. These relationships proved challenging for the new teachers due to their negative impact on their ability to manage their full cohort of pupils effectively.

An increased understanding and appreciation of the circumstances of such pupils came with experience and it was accompanied by an improvement in the quality of the beginning teachers' relationships and engagement with their pupils. David recounts his own learning with regard to one of his pupils in response to an intervention by the home/school/community liaison coordinator:

There is a child in the class who fits into the classic bracket of being 'the smart Alec'. This child is constantly out to undermine my authority in the class. He tries to contradict me along with engaging in plenty of backchat. With the result, that I realise myself, that I can at times be very quick to get on his case and reprimand him. After meeting the HSCL teacher today, it was highlighted to me that this child has a lot of trouble at home in that his mother is sick and in hospital. I therefore made the decision that today I would try to be more sympathetic towards him and ease off him when he would kick up...I now realise that there is often a valid problem that causes misbehaviour and that I will try to be more caring in my teaching.

David, Reflective Journal 3, Term 3

While particular pupils created significant classroom management difficulties for the novices, most of them continued to display a fondness for these pupils and an appreciation that like their peers they possessed positive qualities.

Less severe challenges to pupil-teacher relationships occurred on a relatively regular basis for many of the beginning teachers in response to specific occurrences in the classroom or school. These episodes led to a temporary erosion or a re-evaluation of the relationship on the part of the beginning teacher. Such events often also resulted in the new teachers reassessing their conception of themselves as teachers and in turn resulted in a maturation of their values, beliefs and practices.

6.4.5 Recognition of Self-as-Teacher by Pupils

A number of the beginning teachers recalled particular incidents in the school year in which overt recognition of them as teachers by their pupils

cemented the bond that existed between them. In the main, these events were simple and natural occurrences in the daily life of the classroom. For example, despite much prior anxiety, Fiona decided to bring her pupils to a storytelling session in the local library. The pupils engaged very well and as the storyteller concluded, he asked them to indicate who believed the story he had told by raising their hands. As Fiona recounted:

I didn't put up my hand just to see what the boys would say. And they were looking at me and the next minute your man [the storyteller] came over and he started, "oh you don't believe me" [imitating storyteller's voice]. And they started "leave our teacher alone" [imitating pupils' voices]. They were so protective like. And then when we came back they said, "he was picking on you an awful lot Miss".

Fiona, Interview 1, Term 1

Recognition of self-as-teacher was not only affirming for the new teachers themselves but it in turn served to further strengthen their connection with their pupils. Jenny vividly recalls the first day she spent away from her charges to attend a course for newly qualified teachers:

"What, you're going away, you're not going to be here tomorrow, will you be back for lunch teacher?" [imitating pupils' voices] this kind of thing. And I was like, I'm going to have to leave them for a whole day. All day I was wondering what they were doing. You get really attached to them. And even all the parents like, "oh they missed you, they missed you so much" [imitating parents' voices]. I was like, swelled head. I can't believe how attached I am to them.

Jenny, Interview 2, Term 1

As their first year of teaching came to an end each of the new teachers had developed a strong bond with their pupils. While the level of emotional

intensity of these relationships varied from teacher to teacher and within class settings, each of the study participants was highly cognisant of the fact that their particular group of pupils constituted their first official class with whom they had soldiered during a seminal career period. The intensity of this bond resulted in expressions of deep feelings of affection and protection as is evidenced by Sinéad:

At the end of the day, they are my kids. I'm forever meeting them out in the shops. I love to stop and have a chat with them as well. Sometimes I'd meet them up on the street or they're heading to the hurling match and I'd shout out the window "are you playing a match lads, good luck" [imitating own voice]. But you become very protective of them. They become very much, now these are my boys. They're yours and you want them to do really well.

Sinéad, Interview 4, Term 3

6.5 The Significance of Relationships With Colleagues

The development of relationships with colleagues constituted a significant element of the new teachers' learning agenda from the outset of their first year. As time progressed and as experience and confidence grew, relationships flourished despite the occurrence of some challenging encounters. The desire to become a recognised and accepted member of the school community gained greater prominence and attention with the passing of time.

6.5.1 The Process of Getting to Know New Colleagues

For each of the study participants, becoming a member of a school staff brought with it differing degrees of challenge and opportunity. While for most, the formation of relationships with colleagues proceeded relatively smoothly, it did require effort on their part. Getting to know a myriad of faces, personalities and job roles proved demanding, most particularly in the larger schools. For the participants who had prior experience of their school, their transition into the school community proved somewhat easier.

At the outset of the school year, there was a significant tendency among many of the study participants to form their strongest bonds with teaching colleagues who were also completing or had just completed their probation. This closeness provided them with support and succour as they were of the view that fellow probationers genuinely appreciated their needs and circumstances. To an extent, this placed a limitation on their development of contacts and relationships on a wider school basis, most particularly in the first term and for the new teachers teaching in the larger schools. As Eoin confirmed:

I still haven't got everybody's name inside in the staffroom. I hadn't talked to Eamon and he's only across the corridor until the parent-teacher meetings. It has gotten better. When we came first because myself and David and Donal kind of know each other and Sorcha [fellow probationers] as well, the four of us were like in our own little gang...We weren't exactly going around trying to get to know everyone. It might have made us seem a little bit unfriendly now as well with our own little gang down here. We weren't making the effort to get up and know the others.

Eoin, Interview 2, Term 1

However, as the school year progressed the security ties were loosened and relationships came to be formed with a greater diversity of colleagues. This movement coincided with expressions of increasing confidence and self-assuredness on the part of the novices in tandem with a greater familiarity with their school environment and its personnel. Over the course of the school year, almost all the study participants formed close and supportive relationships with particular colleagues in their schools, with these relationships extending into engagement in social activities outside of school for a number of the beginning teachers. The evolution of these relationships contributed positively to their emerging sense of self-as-teacher as it confirmed for them their membership of the teaching profession and their respective school communities, while simultaneously supporting their entry.

6.5.2 The Formation of Supportive Relationships

The level of support provided to assist in the induction of the newly qualified teachers varied significantly from one school context to the next. In the schools that provided structured induction support, productive relationships

were seen to evolve between the mentees and their mentors. The perceptiveness and approachability of mentors was judged by the novices to be key personal attributes and contributors to the development of a high-quality relationship with them. As Eoin explained:

Miriam [mentor] inside was brilliant like. You could go to her with anything and she'd always come down and ask you if there was anything she could do for you. You don't want to be going asking all the time. You don't want to be giving the impression that you haven't a clue what you're doing. She'd come down and she'd ask you, she might pick up on something that you kind of, you don't want to ask but you're still kind of wondering. She'd pick up on that.

Eoin, Interview 4, Term 3

The lack of formal support in the other school settings, both professional and emotional, was most strongly felt by Sinéad. She found the transition into her new school environment particularly challenging. She also experienced a distressing family event during her first term which affected her greatly. In stark contrast to Eoin's description, she recounted one of her lowest moments as she arrived to school one morning feeling both upset and exhausted:

I remember being in the staffroom that morning and somebody said to me "you look like death" [imitating colleague's voice]. And I said..."I think I just have had enough" [imitating own voice]. And I just thought like "hello, please give me some help here...Can somebody not see that I'm struggling?"

Sinéad, Interview 2, Term 1

The formation of beneficial relationships was not confined to designated mentors. The beginning teachers formed relationships and accessed guidance and support in many instances from other teaching colleagues. These included same-grade teachers, teachers who had taught their particular class grouping previously and in some instances members of their school's special education team. The accessing of advice from more experienced colleagues was however primarily at the instigation of the beginning teachers themselves as the voluntary proffering of advice by veteran teachers occurred on a very infrequent basis.

The beginning teachers had little direct and ongoing contact with their school principals except in the case of one school. In this latter school, which was a smaller school, the principal took a lead role in coordinating the implementation of the school's self-generated induction programme.

A number of the beginning teachers had the experience of having a full-time special needs assistant (SNA) working with them in their classroom. In a majority of cases, a positive and supportive working relationship developed, despite some initial hesitancy on the new teachers' part in some instances.

The realisation of supportive relationships with colleagues reached an elevated level as individual beginning teachers prepared for and completed their general inspection during the final term. The prospect of the "dip day"

appeared to provide a legitimacy to colleagues who may have not had any previous direct involvement with the new teachers to offer assistance, guidance and moral support. This extension of comradery and encouragement was hugely appreciated and served to strengthen relationships and assure the early-career teachers that they had become accepted as integral members of their school community, as confirmed by Elaine:

Everyone was so supportive leading up to it [general inspection]. Teachers that might have nothing to do with it up in sixth class were down to give me a hand if I needed anything. And even if it was just a word or to make a cup of tea, everyone was so supportive. And everyone, even during the day, if they saw you on the corridor "how's it going, I heard it's going great" [imitating colleague's voice]. It was great now the support that I got I have to say.

Elaine, Interview 4, Term 3

6.5.3 The Impact of Challenging Relationships

Not all relationships with colleagues however were as supportive and encouraging as the beginning teachers might have wished. While the existence of challenging relationships was relatively rare, where difficulties were experienced, they had a significant bearing on the emotional well-being of the new teachers concerned. A minority of teaching colleagues were found by them to be unhelpful and uncooperative. Lisa became increasingly frustrated as she attempted to develop a working relationship with the members of the special education team who worked with particular pupils in her class:

But just liaising with the other teachers in terms of IEPs [individual education plans] and things like that. I'm finding that a bit difficult. Some of them are supportive and very good and others are terrible. I've no feedback whatsoever on anything in terms of what they do with the children. I have asked but I find you get a very cold, you know "don't be bothering me" [imitating colleague's voice]. I do find that difficult because I'm only a new teacher and I'm learning and I'm trying to do the best I can for these children in my classroom.

Lisa, Interview 2, Term 1

While Sinéad and Elaine both experienced similar dissatisfaction during the earlier part of the school year, they became more assertive as the year progressed in successfully advocating the case of their pupils.

Some challenging relationships were encountered with SNAs, but again they existed in a minority of cases. Two of the beginning teachers experienced a turbulent first year and challenging incidents, characterised by the perceived ineffective fulfilment of role tasks by the SNA and their non-cooperation with the needs and requests of the novice, were reported as occurring on a regular basis. Both of the new teachers concerned became increasingly discouraged by these events and communicated the difficulties being encountered to their respective principals. Despite the novices' engagement in overt consultation with their principals, feelings of distress and exasperation continued as the hallmarks of these teacher-SNA relationships throughout the first year.

Some of the new teachers also experienced difficult encounters with external tutors who were engaged to deliver aspects of the primary school curriculum

to their pupils. Some of the frustrations experienced emanated from the relinquishing of authority to another person, while other dissatisfactions arose from the manner in which the external tutors engaged with the pupils and conducted their classes.

Difficult encounters with principals were extremely rare. A majority of principals were judged by their newly appointed teachers as being primarily occupied by management issues and the orderly functioning of the school. As such, a foremost concern for many of the new teachers was to ensure that an appropriate standard of classroom management prevailed on occasions when their principals visited their classrooms and that all necessary school-related paperwork was up to date and suitably in order should it be requested for review.

6.5.4 Becoming a Full Member of the School Community

At the outset of the school year the novices were individually quite concerned about their professional status in the eyes of their teaching colleagues. Professional recognition anxieties surfaced at intervals and in response to a variety of stimuli. They centred around occasions in which their professional capacity as a beginning teacher was on display, such as whole-school gatherings, conducting classes in the general-purposes' room, and the results of standardised assessment. Their unease was founded on

their belief that in response to their public displays, their professional capacity would be positively or negatively evaluated by their colleagues.

While the new teachers experienced intermittent knocks to their professional self-esteem at the outset of their first year, they became less frequent and traumatic with increasing experience and confidence. Over time they were replaced with occasional and authentic moments of overt recognition from their colleagues. This feedback ranged from incidental expressions of praise and recognition from more experienced colleagues to more formal acknowledgements of the quality of the beginning teachers' work. The impact of these encounters was to simultaneously strengthen the beginning teachers' identity as a teacher and to enhance their sense of belonging to their school community. Though limited in frequency, some opportunities were also provided for the novices to utilise their expertise in advancing the learning of their colleagues, as Róisín recalled:

It's not just always me asking other people questions. It's nice when like yesterday Irene [senior colleague] came down to me and she said, "what's mind mapping?" [imitating colleague's voice]. It's not always me going and asking her questions. That makes you feel, look I'm here, I'm part of this. It's really nice.

Róisín, Interview 3,
Term 2

As the first year came to a conclusion, the successful completion of the general inspection was an important landmark for each of the beginning teachers in marking their enhanced membership of their school

communities. From their perspectives, the achievement of fully qualified status provided a legitimacy of membership and afforded them greater confidence and self-belief in their interactions with pupils, colleagues and parents alike.

Despite this, hesitancies continued on the part of virtually all the novices in taking a more proactive role in whole-school initiatives. With time they developed an increased understanding of how their school and its personnel functioned and what constituted their school's key priorities and how they might be addressed. Yet a sense of awe predominated regarding the grasping of opportunities to advance their needs, views and expertise amongst their collective colleagues. They continued to be quite overwhelmed by the complexity of their schools as institutions and in turn were reticent to raise their heads above the parapet in contexts where the staff gathered as one grouping to address whole-school concerns.

Of the ten study participants, Elaine was the only beginning teacher who opted to make a significant contribution at a whole-staff gathering which also embodied her taking a lead role in a whole-school initiative. Despite the positive outcome and accompanying boost to her professional self-confidence, the experience proved emotionally demanding at the time:

And then we had one [staff meeting] in April and there was a big discussion about the yard and how things aren't going great in it and bullying seems to be coming up. And I wanted to say "look it, I'll take basketball and I'll take the sixth class and that'll be me, they'll be away from trouble" [imitating own voice]. And I don't know what it was, was it that I'm the youngest, I'm the least experienced, these other twenty-five people have probably tried this before and they know way better than me. So I shut up for ages and I didn't say anything. And then I finally got the courage to actually say "look it Liz [principal], I'll take the thing". And everyone went quiet and my voice was shaking and everything...I could hear my voice shaking and it was just purely saying to them "I'll take the sixth class off the yard". And everyone was so quiet and all twenty-five people were looking at me. It just kind of made me feel "oh, am I saying the right thing at all?"

Elaine, Interview 4, Term 4

6.6 The Impact of Relationships With Parents on Beginning Teachers'

Professional Identity

Interactions with parents constituted a very significant new beginning for the early-career teachers. It was an area of their practice for which they felt particularly ill-prepared. They each faced their first interactions with their parent cohort with significant levels of fear and intrepidation despite being both personable and knowledgeable practitioners.

6.6.1 Informal Interactions With Parents

Informal interactions with parents were most regularly experienced by the teachers of infant and junior classes as these parents accompanied their children to and from school. At the commencement of the school year, such engagement was a cause of some anxiety. However with greater experience, these informal interactions with parents became a natural occurring part of the new teachers' daily routine. They were purposefully

used by them to strengthen their relationships with parents and to enhance their understanding and appreciation of the realities of school life. These engagements were also employed as a useful two-way information flow between teacher and parent, without needing to resort to the formality of an officially convened meeting.

6.6.2 Formally Convened Meetings: Successful Encounters

As the year progressed, most of the beginning teachers experienced having to convene a formally structured meeting with a parent, either at the request of the teacher or at the request of the parent. Particular anxieties were experienced in instances where difficult messages had to be conveyed to parents. In such circumstances, preparation for the meeting on the part of the beginning teacher and the professional support of more experienced colleagues were considered paramount, as is evidenced in Kate's account of a meeting to discuss the need for a psycho-educational assessment:

I was very well informed about Sean's specific needs through my reading of the occupational therapist's report. Meetings such as this can be hard as often the parents do not react well to hearing bad news about their child. This particular case is complex as Sean is a very high achiever in all subject areas. Having a plan with all my thoughts and observations and concerns about Sean helped a lot during the meeting as I remembered everything I wanted to say. Also it was great having the support teacher present to back up and elaborate opinions.

Kate, Reflective Journal 3, Term 3

Engagement in prior consultation with relevant colleagues to gain a greater understanding of the family circumstances and in constructing a possible course of action was a regular feature of the beginning teachers' preparation. Increased experience of formal interactions with parents was accompanied by a greater degree of confidence and effectiveness. Maria, who had experienced particular anxieties in her interactions with parents at the outset of the school year, demonstrated significant growth in her professional confidence and competence as the year progressed. In her final reflective journal, she recalls an incident of critical importance to her:

A boy in my class told another boy that his mother was a 'knacker'. I was shocked by this and really annoyed. I called his mother in after school and told her about it. I also told her about him hitting other boys on the yard. I think I handled the situation well and I am much more confident about reporting incidents to parents and asking for their support in matters. I feel as though I've made great progress in this area.

Maria, Reflective Journal 3, Term 3

6.6.3 Formally Convened Meetings: Challenging Encounters

For many of the new teachers, challenging encounters with parents were experienced intermittently, with concerns regarding pupil behaviour and engagement constituting the most recurring subject for dialogue during such meetings. In the course of these challenging encounters, some of the novices experienced a diminution of their perceived authority as class teacher. This undermining of their position occurred most strongly during the first term and it was often as a direct result of their own actions. David, in his

first formal encounter with a parent to address his child's engagement in serious misbehaviour, found that the meeting did not proceed as he had anticipated:

In the meeting, while I left the father have his say first, I feel I should have advanced my own case more firmly. Instead, the meeting took place mainly on the father's terms. I should have been more forward in the meeting giving a more detailed account of what happened and insisting more on what I felt should be done.

David, Reflective Journal 1, Term 1

Engagement in adequate preparation for formally convened encounters with parents did not always ensure a successful outcome from the beginning teacher's perspective. Many of the novices experienced encounters with parents in which they judged the demands being made of them to be excessive and the assertions made by parents to be untruths. Jenny requested a meeting with the mother of one of her pupils whose behaviour was problematic. To support her in this action, she invited the principal to attend. However, the counterclaims of the parent and the outcome of the meeting were a source of significant irritation to her as is demonstrated in her reflective journal entry:

After the head-butt incident I arranged a meeting...Lasted about three quarters of an hour. Ian's mum came in (like a bull) and maintained her stance that the problem is with other children in the class and not with him. She even went so far as to insinuate that I had a pick on him. Not much progress made...Was not happy with the outcome of this meeting. Afterwards Pat [principal] agreed that I was right to call the meeting. He said because she was so obviously emotional over the issue there would be no point in either of us arguing with her. So basically we had to sit there and let her vent...I'm getting so frustrated.

Jenny, Reflective Journal 2, Term 2

Encounters with parents during which the beginning teachers were victims of abusive exchanges rarely occurred. When they happened, they were primarily due to a misunderstanding between home and school or an over-reaction by a parent in response to a particular incident.

6.6.4 Annual Parent-Teacher Meetings

The prospect of the annual parent-teacher meetings caused considerable anxiety for almost all the novices with their apprehensions centring on whether or not they would be taken seriously by their pupils' parents. However, each of the beginning teachers was pleasantly surprised at the affirming reaction of the parents and the significance which the parents attached to their perspectives, judgements and advice. For the novices, the feedback they in turn received from parents served to strengthen their realisation that they were now fully fledged professionals and as such it contributed significantly to their sense of self-as-teacher. As David recorded in his reflective journal:

The parent-teacher meetings were my first real feedback from a 'non-child' perspective on my teaching so far...much to my surprise and relief I got very positive feedback with parents saying that their children are enjoying school and learning a lot. One parent even said that her child's reading has vastly improved this year. I was absolutely delighted with this feedback. It was a good confidence booster and caused me to re-evaluate how I see myself as a teacher – a professional rather than a student on extended teaching practice (i.e. the dip).

David, Reflective Journal 1, Term 1

As in the case of the one-off, formally convened meetings, engagement in preparation was seen to be critical in facilitating successful parent-teacher meetings. All the novices prepared detailed notes on the progress of each individual pupil, their strengths and possible areas for development. Again however, the new teachers found it challenging to communicate information that did not reflect positively on the individual pupil. Through their engagement in significant preparation and their seeking of guidance from their more experienced colleagues, the study participants adopted an approach in which challenging messages were co-communicated with more positive feedback. Some of the beginning teachers were very conscious of ensuring that their messages were clearly communicated in a manner that was understood by parents and in which their support was secured. As Sinéad explained:

I just felt like you could just kind of say it in a way that wasn't offensive...you couldn't go in, there was no point in going in all guns blazing. There's no point in even going in in an attack mode, you're only wasting your time...You need to go in and get them on side with you a bit.

Sinéad, Interview 3, Term 2

Engagement with the parents of newcomer pupils brought an additional learning dimension for the novices. Many of these parents possessed a lesser capacity to communicate fluently in English and some of them opted to bring their own interpreter to the parent-teacher meeting. From the beginning teachers' perspective many of these parents also reflected cultural nuances and expectations that were fundamentally different to those with which the new teachers were accustomed.

The parent-teacher meetings not only served to provide parents with an update on their child's progress, they also provided the beginning teachers with a unique additional insight into the pupils. For some of the participants, this was a somewhat unanticipated outcome. As Eoin found:

They [the parents] were great you know...It was great to hear their side of it as well because you wouldn't know otherwise. There's one fellow in my class and he's extremely bright. And when he puts up his hand I know he knows the answer, so I always give someone else a chance. And he was actually going home some evenings crying because I wasn't asking him enough questions. Now I wouldn't have in a million years dreamed that that was how he felt. Parent-teacher meetings are a good thing. You get a better sense of the child and the family they belong to.

Eoin, Interview 2, Term 1

A number of the beginning teachers expressed disappointment at the fact that some of their parents did not attend the parent-teacher meetings. Those who did not attend were among the parents the novices most wished to meet and despite their best efforts to practically address this situation by

reconvening meetings, the status quo remained. Among the beginning teachers, there was a palpable sense that these particular parents were unlikely to engage in voluntary contact with the school. Their non-attendance was judged by them to be symptomatic of a wider lack of engagement with schooling, due in many instances to the parents' own prior experiences of education. This further manifested itself in poor pupil attendance and a lack of ongoing parental support for their child's work at school. This tendency was reported as being significantly more pronounced among the families experiencing the greatest levels of socio-economic disadvantage.

6.7 Evolving Conceptions of Self-as-Teacher

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the newly qualified teachers who participated in this study held clearly defined conceptions of the type of teacher they wished to become as they commenced their careers. As their first year in teaching progressed, aspects of these conceptions were strengthened while other elements waned. New dimensions were also introduced as the novices reflected on themselves as evolving teachers and as they interacted with the reality of their newly acquired working environments.

Assertiveness in the classroom and relationship building with pupils continued to be an important double-sided coin that the novices variously toyed with. For many, their initial desire to fulfil the role of friend to their

pupils was overtaken as soon as the school year formally commenced by their perceived need to be seen to be in charge. This constant requirement to maintain a safe distance between them and their pupils dissipated for some with greater classroom experience and the development of reciprocal relationships with pupils. For others, a degree of distance was maintained throughout the first year and was deemed justifiable on the grounds of maintaining an appropriate balance in teacher-pupil relationships and ensuring the realisation of high work outputs from pupils.

Over the course of their first year in teaching, the study participants came to an increasing understanding of their pupils, their home backgrounds and the circumstances of their school. For the early-career teachers who began their careers with a well-developed conception of teaching as being the provision of a secure and happy learning environment, their dedication to being a caring teacher was further enhanced by the experience of their first year. However, for a minority of the novices, realising the commitment to care in a relatively turbulent and unpredictable working environment brought with it its own disappointments. While Maria continued to maintain a high degree of compassion for her pupils and their home circumstances, she found the experience of her first year to be emotionally wearing. By the year's end, she was forced to concede to the power of factors that she saw as existing outside her control:

I kind of just take it one day at a time with them to be honest and try and encourage them as much as I can. But it is very, very frustrating. There's only so much you can do with them. You kind of have to take a step back from them at times and you can't be too hard on yourself. You can only do so much at the end of the day. I've kind of had to learn that the hard way as well.

Maria, Interview 4, Term 3

The unpredictability of the working environments in which the new teachers found themselves teaching also impacted upon their conceptions of themselves as teachers. Many of them entered the profession with a strong commitment to the value of structure and the establishment of routines. However, they quickly found that the capacity to be prepared for and responsive to the unexpected was a necessary professional competence. Interruptions to the flow of activity in their individual classrooms were regularly experienced as colleagues arrived to team teach, as pupils were withdrawn for supplementary teaching and as pupils from special classes were temporarily integrated with their peers. As the school year progressed, a variety of whole-school and extracurricular activities began to encroach on teaching time, as did occasional outbursts of serious pupil misbehaviour. For some of the beginning teachers, significant levels of frustration were experienced, as is evidenced by Sinéad:

I hate when everything gets thrown up into the air, out of routine, I don't like that actually...And I think that's coming from me. I think I've realised that now. I don't like that total disruption to my class. If I've plans there I like to have them taught. If I come in without having the opportunity to teach what I was hoping to teach because of some disruption, it upsets me. And I think that's something that I have to learn, to compromise my time maybe a little bit more...I have to be a little bit more giving and understanding.

Sinéad, Interview 4, Term 4

Most of the novices gradually came to terms with the way in which their school environment functioned, which to them appeared relatively unpredictable and turbulent in comparison to their initial expectations. Over the course of their first year they were challenged to see themselves as working more as members of a group rather than in idyllic isolation in their individual classrooms, even in the schools in which the development of a collaborative working culture was still in its infancy. Through experience, they were also compelled to understand that they worked in institutions in which multiple learning activities and events operated concurrently.

In tandem with having to develop a more flexible attitude to the hurly-burly of everyday life at school, their first year in the profession also caused a significant shift in their capacity to be responsive to pupils' interests and learning needs in the classroom. On entering teaching, each of the study participants expressed commitment to providing pupils with engaging learning experiences, although differences did exist in the clarity of their views as to how this was to be realised. As the year progressed, and as the study participants became more intimately familiar with their pupil cohort,

their capacity to tap into pupils' interests, to encourage engagement in learning through the structuring of stimulating lessons and activities and to be innovative in their teaching approaches came to the fore. This growth and reconceptualisation of self-as-teacher required the beginning teachers to take calculated risks, to relinquish a degree of authority and to facilitate the development of pupils' independent learning skills. Elaine, who was among the novices who highly prized structure and organisation, quickly became cognisant of the potential of collaborative discovery as a means of realising high-level learning for her pupils:

So holding myself back has been something I've learned, to let them go at it and see that they actually can make, they can actually do the learning themselves, teach themselves with some things. It's very interesting to see them realise "oh no, that's not going to work, I have to try something else" [imitating pupils' voices].

Elaine, Interview 4, Term 3

As the first year neared its conclusion, most particularly when the general inspection had been successfully completed, the new teachers experienced a greater professional freedom in structuring their overall programme of learning for their pupils. Initially, they were particularly self-constrained in ensuring that all lessons were implemented exactly as planned in time-bound periods. Diversions or tangents were feared and avoided, irrespective of the learning potential inherent in them. However as the year end was closing in, they judged it to be important for them to embody openness and flexibility in the manner in which they structured the learning opportunities in

their classrooms. With experience and growing confidence, the novices perceived themselves as operating with a freedom and conviction more akin to their veteran colleagues.

6.8 The Journey Through the First Year of Teaching

The journey through the first year in teaching brought with it simultaneous joys and woes, challenges and opportunities. For each of the beginning teachers, the process of learning to be a teacher became easier with time. Increased experience was accompanied by greater enjoyment of and fulfilment in their chosen career. However, the first-year journey was not without its intermittent tribulations for many of the novices. In the course of these emotionally-laden ordeals their emerging identities were undermined as they began to query their ability to be the kind of teacher to which they aspired. Such internal turbulence was most often triggered by the burden of work placed on them, in particular when it coincided with episodic difficulties in managing pupils' behaviour. Sinéad reached a particularly low ebb in her final term as she strove to meet the needs of a pupil with significant emotional and behavioural difficulties:

I feel like a constant complainer at the moment but school is terrible. I have looked for the positive points but I am not seeing any light at the end of the tunnel right now. It's just that every time I seem to take one step forward in the classroom it is followed by two steps back. When I trained as a teacher I learned about positive discipline, encouragement, setting boundaries in a safe and happy environment and staying positive. Well it's a pity that no-one taught us about the exception to all the rules, the child who cannot be disciplined, the one who is sceptical of encouragement, the one who knows no boundaries.

Sinéad, Reflective Journal 3, Term 3

Periods of illness, which were experienced by many of the beginning teachers over the course of their first year, also contributed significantly to feelings of inadequacy. Cold and flu episodes were common and they resulted in considerable wear and tear on their personal health and on their capacity to teach. The beginning teachers experienced various pressure points in which a combination of factors conspired to weaken physical and emotional energy levels. These events produced a strong desire to create space and distance between teacher and school, as exemplified by Eoin:

We have a mid-term break this week and I really need it. I am still not feeling a hundred per cent after being sick a few weeks ago. This week I'm re-charging my batteries and not giving school a second thought. I've had a very busy last few weeks. I've been sick and tired physically and metaphorically of school. I need a holiday. This week is for relaxing so I can come back fresh to school. I feel I need this break. I'm tired and stressed. Teaching is a demanding job.

Eoin, Reflective Journal 3, Term 3

Primary teaching as a career proved to be different and more challenging than the novices had anticipated, most particularly in the earlier part of the school year. Any pre-conceptions they had about working in a 'nine to three'

job were quickly banished as they came to terms with the attendant demands of planning and preparation, assessing pupils' work and developing profiles of pupils' progress. While such teacher requirements were met with increasing ease and confidence as the first year progressed, it was the desire to teach, to be in front of a classroom of pupils, that most enthused and assured the novices.

Each of the new teachers fondly recalled 'special moments' that occurred in their classrooms over the course of their first year in teaching. Some of these occurrences were relatively simple in nature, such as the whole-class acquisition of a mathematical concept, progress made by a particular child or the receiving of a compliment from a pupil or parent. Others were more grand, public performances of pupils' abilities and work. However, irrespective of the splendour of the event, they served to strengthen the novices' bond with their pupils and to confirm for them that they were good at what they did.

Even the cut and thrust of the demands of working in a school in a designated area of socio-economic disadvantage began to grow on the early-career teachers as the year progressed. While many of them continued to find it difficult to cope with the relative unpredictability of working in such environments, for others this same instability, diversity of pupils and multiplicity of activities excited and energised them, as attested to by Fiona:

Here it's different, there's something new everyday to deal with. It's not that you know that they're going to be great everyday. At times I'd be going home, going "why am I here at all?" [imitating own voice] But in general I love working here.

Fiona, Interview 3, Term 2

At the end of their first year and having acquired fully qualified status, each of the beginning teachers displayed a personally unique combination of relief, elation and bordering anti-climax. The year had brought with it a distinct combination of demands and pressures for each of the participants. Reaching this point in their careers and having been formally assessed as being capable practitioners seemed to banish any lingering doubts as to their professional competence. Achieving the final seal of professional approval confirmed that they were good at what they did and that they were deserving of full and lifetime membership of the teaching profession.

As the first year concluded, the novices expressed satisfaction in having chosen primary teaching as their career. For the eight female participants, they attributed their satisfaction to primarily intrinsic factors, such as their enjoyment of teaching and their fulfilment in facilitating pupils' learning and development. As Elaine confirmed:

I'm absolutely delighted with my decision. Like people at the weekend say "well how's work?" [imitating friends' voices] And I'm kind of like "work". And even on Sunday evening when they say "you've to go back to work tomorrow", I still never seem to call it work...I don't feel like it's work. I know there's one or two days when you're tired or something you feel "oh goodness me" but I honestly really enjoy what I do. That's why I say it doesn't feel like work. Because I've worked in shops when I was in college and restaurants and that felt like work. Because I wasn't enjoying it, but no I really am now, I'm delighted that I chose the right thing.

Elaine, Interview 4, Term 3

In contrast, David and Eoin, who both had competing career choices when they made the decision to enter primary teaching, attributed their satisfaction to more extrinsically oriented factors:

I am I suppose [happy with career choice]. I've no regrets. I wouldn't be getting up in the morning dreading going into work. It isn't like "oh man, work again today" [imitating own voice]. Obviously I'd be looking forward to weekends and stuff as well. It's grand out like. And taking a more broader withdrawn look at it, when you look at the way the country is going as well, you have to be honest with yourself. There's jobs leaving the country here, there and everywhere. I'm in a job I enjoy, there's nice hours and it's permanent and I happen to enjoy it as well like.

David, Interview 4, Term 3

Successfully reaching the end of their first year of teaching was considered by each of the beginning teachers to have been a momentous achievement. They crossed the final hurdle of the general inspection with a mixture of awe, exhaustion, relief and exhilaration. As they reflected on the completion of their first year, many of them looked back in wonder on the journey they had travelled but also looked forward to the opportunities that lay ahead to

continue to evolve into the teacher they aspired to be. As Sinéad recorded in her final reflective journal entry:

This year really has been an experience but I am on the other side now, I have a fabulous class of boys that I am very proud of and that worked really hard all year as well as on the dip day. I have built a great relationship with most of the boys and they will always be a special class because they are my first class in primary school. They have taught me so much and I hope they will look back on this school year as being a good year overall. Even though there are loads of negative entries in my diary I am happy overall with the year for a first year and I look forward to many more years with more positives each year and less negatives.

Sinéad, Reflective Journal 3, Term 3

The conclusion of the first year also saw the beginning teachers engaging in reflection on the teaching positions they held in their schools. Seven of them by now held permanent teaching positions. The three who held temporary positions had the option of continuing in that capacity for a further school year. Two of this latter group left their schools during the summer period having secured permanent teaching positions in other schools. A third teacher from the cohort of permanently appointed teachers transferred to another school during the first term of the following school year. Each of these three teachers assumed positions in primary schools in non-designated areas of socio-economic disadvantage.

6.9 Conclusion

The prevailing culture of the schools in which the newly qualified teachers were appointed impacted significantly on their evolving professional identity

as primary teachers. For a majority of the novices, a culture of structural collaboration (Williams et al., 2001) predominated in which planned induction supports were implemented to aid their professional socialisation. Nevertheless, four of the ten beginning teachers experienced school cultures that did not meet their expectations and needs. These latter cultures were characterised by individualism (Hargreaves, 1994) and an absence of openness and team work. As a consequence, they increased substantially the early-career teachers' sense of isolation in their classrooms and of having to go it alone in making decisions of importance to them. The experiencing of an ideological clash with prevailing school practices was substantially more common among this sub-group of new teachers. As Day (1999) and Tickle (2000) suggest, they experienced a two-way struggle in trying to create harmony between the in-class operationalisation of their personally held vision while being subjected to the powerful influencing force of the existing school culture. For most of these new teachers, they successfully avoided succumbing to their school's more conservative institutional norms, due to the strength of their intrinsic motivations.

As asserted by Clement and Vanderberghe (2001), the early-career teachers in this study placed their relationships with pupils at the core of their work. The intensity of these relationships and the novices' commitment to counteracting the perceived negative impacts of home-background factors were more pronounced among the new teachers for whom relationship

building was a lynchpin of their self-as-teacher. Relationship building with pupils also functioned as a reciprocal process. The pupils powerfully influenced, both positively and negatively, how the new teachers conceived of themselves as teachers and the degree of satisfaction they derived from their work (Churchill & Walkington, 2002). The strengthening of teacher-pupil bonds, including through pupil-initiated displays of recognition and affection, resulted in increasingly candid engagement by almost all the novices. It also resulted in improvements in the effectiveness of teaching and learning as the pupils eagerly responded to their new teachers' openness and accessibility. Despite this positive development, most of the beginning teachers experienced occasional challenges in their relationships with some of their pupils, with such difficulties being more commonly and intensively experienced in the all-boys' primary schools. As contended by Olson and Osborne (1991), the existence of these conflictual relationships held significant emotional consequences for the new teachers including frustration, disappointment and disillusionment.

Almost all the newly qualified teachers formed close and supportive relationships with particular colleagues as their first year in teaching progressed. In the schools in which formal mentoring systems operated, the mentees unanimously highlighted the importance of the interpersonal qualities of their mentors (Killeavy & Murphy, 2005; Tickle, 2000) and the positive contribution of the mentor-mentee relationship to their induction and

socialisation. Professional support from wider colleagues, while provided in relative abundance, was received primarily in response to the advances of the novices themselves.

New teachers' concern for their professional status was most strongly experienced by them when they judged that their professional capacity was on public display and positioned for direct evaluation by their professional peers. While acknowledging the impact of such vulnerability, authentic moments of overt recognition by these same colleagues served to strengthen the novices' professional self-esteem and their sense of membership of their school community (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). The existence of challenging relationships with colleagues was relatively rare. Where colleagues were experienced as being unhelpful and uncooperative, such encounters impacted negatively on the new teachers' emotional well-being. Despite the perceived criticality of the role of principal in supporting new teacher development (OECD, 2005; Tickle, 2000), little direct and ongoing contact was experienced by a significant majority of the study participants.

As in the case of numerous earlier enquiries (for example Melnick & Meister, 2008; B. Wilson et al., 1997), the newly qualified teachers in this study felt particularly ill-prepared for their pending encounters with parents. Despite their apprehensions, each was pleasantly surprised and their fully fledged

professional status was strongly affirmed by their engagement with parents during formal parent-teacher meetings. However, in fulfilling their socialising role, disapproving feedback and comment from parents conversely served to impact negatively on the new teachers' perceptions of how well they were performing as teachers (Wildman et al., 1989). In addition, the lesser engagement of parents from more disadvantaged families was a cause of particular distress and frustration. While most of the new teachers attributed this lesser participation to prior, negative experiences of education and only a minority construed it as an absence of parental concern, relative naivety was displayed with regard to the challenges faced by such parents in participating in their children's education (Ratcliff & Hunt, 2009).

The journey through the first year in teaching resulted in a significant evolution in the conceptions the study participants held of themselves as teachers. As concluded by Flores and Day (2006) and Feiman-Nemser (2001b), the new-teacher conceptions in this inquiry strongly vacillated between teacher as classroom manager and teacher as relationship builder. New conceptions were also introduced into the self-as-teacher mix. Chief among these was their capacity to reorient their desire for structure and routine in their classrooms to accommodate the unpredictability and co-occurrence of multiple activities and learning events that characterised their school environments. Increased experience and an accompanying rise in their professional confidence resulted in improvements in their professional

practice and higher levels of job satisfaction. The early-career teachers progressively assumed greater professional freedom in structuring and implementing programmes of learning in their classrooms. This evolving conception of themselves as proficient and self-assured practitioners who could make pedagogically reasoned and contextually informed decisions regarding their professional practice was significantly bolstered by the growing acceptance of them as legitimate members of their school communities and their achievement of the status of fully qualified primary teacher.

CHAPTER 7

FINAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Introduction

The aim of this inquiry was to investigate the induction and socialisation experiences of a cohort of ten beginning teachers in their first year of teaching in primary schools in designated areas of socio-economic disadvantage. This chapter commences by providing answers to the six research questions which underpinned the design and implementation of the study. It identifies the factors that facilitated or impeded the new teachers' entry into the teaching profession and makes recommendations as to how identified shortcomings might be addressed. It examines the contribution of this study to ensuring a greater appreciation of the process of professional socialisation inherent in the initial phase of a primary teacher's career. It identifies the strengths and limitations of the study and the relevance of its outcomes for educational policy and practice. It concludes by providing some recommendations for pertinent further research that would serve to address the multifarious aspects of beginning primary teaching.

7.2 Addressing the Research Questions

Each of the six research questions that motivated the undertaking of this inquiry is addressed in turn.

7.2.1 How Do Beginning Teachers Experience Their First Year of Teaching in Urban Primary Schools in Designated Areas of Socio-economic Disadvantage?

This inquiry confirms that the nature of a beginning teacher's first-year experience of primary teaching results from the interaction of aspects of the self, namely personal biography and conceptions of self-as-teacher, with facets of school context. Differing biographies and images of teaching impact on how the individual new teacher experiences his or her initial year. As a consequence, the challenges and opportunities that the particular school context presents are experienced and interpreted in differing ways in response to the individual make-up of the self. Each of the ten beginning teachers who participated in this study experienced the first year of teaching in an urban primary school in a designated area of socio-economic disadvantage as being a uniquely idiosyncratic process. No two primary schools presented exactly the same experience and no two newly appointed teachers in the same school experienced their first-year encounter in precisely the same way.

Their individual decisions to enter the primary teaching profession constituted a combination of Manuel's (2003) altruism and idealism, and Flores and Day's (2006) motivation to acquire a stable and secure job, though the former was significantly foregrounded by the female novices. For each of the study participants, their prior experiences of primary and post-

primary schooling, both positive and negative, played a strongly influential role in refining their personally devised conceptions of the type of teacher they wished to become. The impact of familial influence, though present in some individual cases, did not hold significant sway. On completing their programmes of initial teacher education, the newly qualified teachers' primary focus was on the acquisition of a teaching position, rather than on securing a teaching position in a particular school. While some of the study participants had a degree of prior experience of the schools in which they were appointed, actual levels of familiarity with their school contexts were limited, most particularly in relation to their status as primary schools in designated areas of socio-economic disadvantage.

On their formal arrival in their respective schools, the cohort of novices experienced a range of differing approaches to facilitate their orientation. In the three schools in which induction mechanisms had been put in place, the commencement of the process of socialisation was variously aided by designated mentors or members of the school's senior management. In the remaining two schools, the beginning teachers were very much left to their own devices. Despite this disparity in provision, much learning about pupils and school context occurred for each of the new teachers as a result of trialling or by default. However, the learning process was significantly less challenging and worrying for those for whom structured induction supports were provided. As previously highlighted by Manuel (2003) and Renard

(2003), minimal material or other allowances were made for the relative inexperience of the beginning teachers in each of the schools and all were allocated a full teaching workload from the outset.

Assimilation into their newly acquired class contexts embodied varying levels of reality shock as the novices' ideals and expectations interfaced with the realities presented to them. In particular, they were variously struck by the multiplicity of abilities and needs of their diverse learners in tandem with the overt and covert manifestations of socio-economic disadvantage present in their classrooms and schools. For many of them, issues of educational disadvantage had been scantily addressed during their programmes of initial teacher education. Consequently their understanding of and experiences of teaching in less advantaged communities were limited and the new teachers assessed themselves as possessing varying levels of readiness to meet the collective challenges presented to them. As in the case of previous research in the Irish context (Department of Education and Science Inspectorate, 2005; Killeavy & Murphy, 2005), the new teachers in this study reported varying levels of perceived preparedness to address particular areas of the primary school curriculum, to attend to the diversity of learning needs of their pupils and to address the range of organisational requirements incumbent on the fully fledged class teacher.

The beginning teachers' first year of teaching was filled to capacity with a series of challenges and opportunities. Overall, it proved to be significantly more difficult and demanding than the new teachers had initially anticipated. The relentless complexity of the job, the incessant arrival of new aspects of the role to be learned and the occurrence of intermittent assaults on their professional self-esteem all took their toll on the beginning teachers' physical, professional and emotional well-being. Added to this mix was the co-occurrence of probation, which was a cause of substantial additional anxiety (Bullough et al., 2004).

However, increased experience in the classroom and school was accompanied by growing levels of professional competence and personal fulfilment in enacting their chosen career. Greater levels of experience were also accompanied by the development of increasingly strong bonds with pupils and colleagues alike, as the novices experienced a continual strengthening of their membership of their school communities. For them, their sense of self-as-teacher and their belief in their ability to be an effective practitioner were significantly affirmed following the successful completion of their general inspection and the awarding of fully qualified status. While the relative unpredictability of life in primary schools in designated areas of socio-economic disadvantage and their comparatively higher levels of pupil diversity continued to unnerve some of the study participants, the successful

completion of their first year brought with it immense levels of personal and professional satisfaction.

7.2.2 What Are the Learning Experiences Beginning Teachers Go Through in Learning to Do What Teachers Do?

For the early-career teachers who participated in this study, the necessity to learn about their newly acquired cohort of pupils and school context proved paramount in the early days and weeks. The diversity of their pupils and the variety of their home circumstances quickly registered and this realisation sat rather uncomfortably with the prior experiences of a number of the novices. In the case of those who more strongly defined their teacher-self as that of relationship builder, their increasing appreciation of the complexity of their pupils' home circumstances strengthened their emotional bond with them. However, for others intermittent feelings of negativity and despondency persisted (Achinstein & Barrett, 2004), through which negative characterisations of pupils' home circumstances endured.

With time, each new teacher came to increasingly know their pupils' individual and collective combinations of knowledge, interests and life experiences. In turn they used this understanding to inform the planning and implementation of programmes of learning in their classrooms. As Intrator (2003) would suggest, the novices increasingly attempted to seek intersections between curriculum and their pupils' interests and strengths as

a means of ensuring their active engagement in their learning. However, the intensity of effort did vary from one new teacher to another.

With regard to school context, the new teachers' immediate learning concerns centred on ensuring their understanding of and compliance with a plethora of day-to-day procedural matters (Killeavy & Murphy, 2005). With increased experience they came to an elevated understanding of their respective schools' whole-school priorities, though they continued to be considerably awestruck regarding the degree and diversity of ongoing activity in their schools. For the early-career teachers who had access to mentors, the process of familiarisation with school context was significantly facilitated.

The requirement to engage in extensive classroom-based planning for the implementation of the curriculum proved particularly onerous from the outset, most especially because of its inherent link for the novices with the prospect of probation. A concentrated process of document and resource dissection and intensive consultation with current and recent probationers resulted in the production of detailed plans of work. For a minority of the new teachers, the process of planning continued to be significantly burdensome for an extended period of time, with illumination and some solace being ultimately provided by their assigned inspectors. While for most of the novices, engagement in thorough planning generated confidence and assurance in

their ability to teach well, for a minority it was judged as being solely a condition of probation and was infrequently consulted in the course of day-to-day practice in the classroom.

As is suggested in much contemporary research on beginning teaching, the new teachers who participated in this study demonstrated an interest from the outset in how their pupils learned (Bullough et al., 2004; Burn et al., 2000; Watzke, 2007), with most of them equally displaying concern for the persistent achievement of high-level learning outcomes by them. Initially, significant degrees of trial and error were employed in designing and implementing lessons and their endeavours were accompanied by an emotionally charged combination of successes and disappointments (Renard, 2003). With time, the use of trial-and-error approaches gave way to the application of more informed tinkering (Bullough et al., 2004) and more intricate pedagogical problem solving. Opportunities for engagement in collaborative reflection on the new teachers' emerging practice with veteran colleagues were however limited, even in the schools in which structured induction systems were in place. The level and quality of engagement in personal reflection varied substantially, with its prevalence being significantly more pronounced among the teachers who possessed a clearly articulated conception of good teaching in tandem with intense intrinsic motivation.

Greater experience of the teaching and learning act was accompanied by the utilisation of a greater diversity of teaching methodologies and approaches by most of the beginning teachers. For others however, the additional planning and resourcing demands inherent in implementing a more sophisticated teaching repertoire made it less desirable. This period also reflected their emerging understanding of the symbiotic relationship between generating pupil interest and enthusiasm and ensuring their positive engagement, as advanced by Feiman-Nemser (2001b). Despite this development, displays of challenging or uncooperative behaviour by particular pupils continued to dissuade or modify the initial teaching intentions of some of the new teachers.

For some of the novices, the development of a coherent conceptual map of the curriculum (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007) proved problematic, and a combination of time-management pressures and self-perceived professional competence resulted in particular areas of the curriculum being implemented in a more uncoordinated and ad-hoc fashion. Difficulties were widely experienced, most particularly in the earlier part of the school year, in effectively judging the degree of instructional time required to complete an activity or topic while simultaneously ensuring that the intended learning outcomes had been achieved by all pupils. Experience brought increased confidence and flexibility, and for most a greater use of integration opportunities and the implementation of a broader and more

balanced curriculum. The new teachers came to increasingly take risks, to change lesson tack as necessitated and to inject a greater degree of fun into their encounters with pupils. Improved teaching was accompanied by the steady realisation of improved learning outcomes on the part of pupils, which in turn served to bolster the new teachers' professional self-esteem and sense of self-as-teacher.

Engagement in purposeful assessment and the structuring of differentiated learning opportunities, including for pupils with formally diagnosed special educational needs proved continually problematic (Bezzina, 2006; Cains & Brown, 1998; Gash, 2006; Killeavy & Murphy, 2005). For many of the novices, a lack of assuredness as to what and how to assess, how to effectively use the results of assessment and how to respond to the diversity of learning needs present in their classrooms endured. In the main, provision for assessment and differentiation was confined to English and mathematics. For the majority of beginning teachers who gained increasing mastery of the use of formative assessment, more purposeful differentiation in curriculum mediation ensued. However, for others, the propensity for the use of less onerous summative assessment coupled with an avoidance of the high-level implementation demands of more focused differentiation resulted in a lowering of expectations of particular pupils' completion rates of whole-class assigned work and a more explicit shifting of responsibility for pupils' learning to the special education teachers.

The establishment of classroom management routines, most particularly in relation to the effective management of pupils' behaviour, proceeded with relative ease for a small number of the new teachers. For most however, it proved to be significantly more challenging. Repeated experimentation was engaged in as they attempted to convey expectations and to establish routines and practices. For some, the challenges experienced by them in problem construction and their lesser developed understandings of the connections between instruction and management (Martin, 2004) resulted in the achievement of varying degrees of classroom management effectiveness. Where pupils displayed particularly challenging behaviour, which in many instances co-occurred with a diagnosed emotional and/or behavioural difficulty, such manifestations proved to be continually the most problematic. For some of the beginning teachers, as in the case of the Schempp et al. (1993) study, it resulted in a foregrounding of classroom management concerns in designing and implementing curriculum. For a minority it also accounted for a tendency to react excessively to pupil indiscretions (Needels, 1991) and resulted in an occasional compromising of the new teacher's professional composure.

Increased experience and the adoption of a more problem-solving orientation, as well as, for some, engagement in consultation with mentors and veteran colleagues, proved beneficial in developing their capacity to manage pupils' behaviour and engagement more effectively. Despite this

progression, difficulties continued to be experienced by half of the newly qualified teachers throughout their first year and such struggles were most common in the all-boys' primary schools.

7.2.3 How Does Beginning Teachers' Professional Identity, Self-as-Teacher, Evolve Over the Course of Their First Year in Teaching?

This research confirms that the development of beginning teachers' professional identity is inherently bound up with their engagement in the process of learning to teach. The study participants' emerging self-as-teacher was considerably influenced by their other life and learning experiences, including their prior experiences of schooling and of pre-service education. The evolution of their professional identity took on a whole new development curve as they donned the mantle of newly qualified teacher. High levels of sense-making and interpretation ensued as the reality of the innate interweaving of identity and context materialised (Smagorinsky et al., 2004).

For the beginning teachers who participated in this study, the culture of their respective schools served to shape their emerging views of themselves as teachers and of the teaching profession more generally. While a majority of school cultures were judged as being open and responsive to the needs of the new teachers and facilitated their socialisation into the teaching profession, negative experiences of school culture were much more

prominently reported. Four of the ten beginning teachers experienced school cultures that did not meet their expectations and needs, and were characterised by individualism and the absence of team working. As a result, feelings of isolation were strongly experienced by these new teachers in tandem with a lesser feedback on and affirmation of their emerging professional practice. For a small number of beginning teachers, school practices were uncovered that clashed with their personally held beliefs and aspirations (Tickle, 2000), with such practices being more prevalent in the primary schools that exemplified cultures of individualism. Most of this latter group of early-career teachers continued to pursue their intended course of action due to their pre-established levels of commitment (Flores & Day, 2006), their intrinsic motivations and the significance to them of the matters being addressed.

While the role of principal is widely considered as being critical in the successful induction of new teachers (OECD, 2005), only one of the principals in this study played a continually active role in facilitating the process. In the other school contexts, the role of principal was manifested in more managerial terms with the day-to-day responsibilities for induction being delegated to other experienced members of staff.

As the year progressed, the close relationships that had been formed with fellow probationers, most particularly in the larger primary schools, were

extended outwards to include an ever widening circle of colleagues. Over time, familiar and supportive relationships were forged by almost all the new teachers with particular colleagues that dually served to fulfil the role of confidant and guide. The provision of advice was invariably in response to a discrete request from the individual novice, but such appeals were generously responded to. In the schools in which formal induction mechanisms were in place, this role was regularly filled but not solely confined to a designated mentor. As suggested by Bullough et al. (2004), the mentors in this inquiry were judged by their mentees to serve a variety of interrelated roles namely, assisting significantly with the orientation process, continually addressing a multitude of organisational and curriculum oriented queries and providing much appreciated emotional support.

In the schools in which such supports were not present, heightened levels of segregation and of operating unassisted were experienced, despite the likelihood of a positive response to requests for assistance. The occurrence of challenging relationships with colleagues, while rare, impacted significantly on the emotional well-being of the beginning teachers who experienced such negative encounters. A minority of colleagues was experienced as being unhelpful and uncooperative. However, as the position of the novices became more established in their schools, such challenges were met with increasing confidence and a capacity to constructively assert themselves and to follow through on alternative but firmly held perspectives.

The progression of the first school year in teaching brought with it increasing incidents of naturally occurring but overt recognition of the new teachers' practice by their professional peers. As Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002) contend, such events contributed positively to the novices' professional self-esteem and to their feeling of belonging to their school community. However, opportunities for the new teachers to showcase their particular expertise and to contribute directly to the professional development of their colleagues were rare (Inman & Marlow, 2004). The scheduling and successful completion of the general inspection at the year's end served as a significant conduit for colleagues to provide unsolicited support to the early-career teachers and to openly affirm them in their endeavours.

The nurturing of relationships with colleagues was surpassed in importance by the cultivation of relationships with pupils (Spear et al., 2000; Wildman et al., 1989). Many of the new teachers erred on the side of caution in their early efforts to foster relationships with their charges due to concern for the possible emergence of classroom management difficulties. However, for almost all of them, the formation of sensitive and caring relationships emerged as an important personal and professional goal and for the majority, an overt commitment to caring materialised. In instances where such commitments existed at an elevated level, explicit manifestations of care and concern in an effort to counteract the effects of socio-economic disadvantage and the occurrence of specific traumatic events in the lives of

individual pupils were in evidence. As the first school year progressed, the reciprocation of relationships by the pupils occurred at ever increasing levels due to the maturation of teacher-pupil bonds. Opportunities for engagement in general banter and a lowering of the professional guard were accompanied by more regular, pupil-initiated expressions of support and affection (Hargreaves, 2000).

Despite this development, challenges to the cultivation of teacher-pupil relationships were experienced by a majority of the new teachers as were concomitant attacks on their evolving identity and professional self-esteem. Such challenges generally occurred in response to particular events in the classroom and they resulted in a temporary erosion or a re-evaluation of those relationships. The occurrence of more serious challenges was more pronounced in the all-boys' primary schools but was not restricted to them. For many of the new teachers, the acquisition of a greater understanding of the factors underlying displays of more challenging behaviour and the development of an increased capacity to reframe situations in order to satisfactorily resolve them resulted in a maturation of their attitudes, beliefs and actions. Despite the intermittent turmoil of relationship building, each of the novices concluded their first year with a sense that their cohort of pupils was significant to them, while the strength and level of reciprocation of those bonds and the intensity of their consequent contribution to the formation of teacher identity varied from one classroom context to the next.

In support of the findings of Inman and Marlow (2004), professional recognition by parents was found to cultivate positive feelings of efficacy and accomplishment. While the new teachers commenced their first year with grave reservations regarding their perceived capacity to engage formally with parents, both formal and informal encounters resulted in the dissipation of self-doubts. These interactions powerfully acknowledged the status of the novices as fully fledged teachers, as the parents of their pupils did not distinguish between them and their more veteran colleagues. However, the cultivation of relationships with parents was not without its arduous demands. The communication of difficult messages, particularly regarding pupils' progress, continued to prove professionally demanding. Challenging encounters with parents also occurred, although abusive interactions were rare. Such challenging encounters were precipitated by a variety of causes and resulted in a range of outcomes including a diminution of the novice's perceived authority as class teacher, feelings of indignation, and a lessening of self-perceived professional competence. Reactions of disappointment and resignation accompanied the non-engagement of particular parents with the new teachers and the school more generally, and were most commonly represented by the families who were experiencing the greatest levels of socio-economic disadvantage.

7.2.4 What Are the Factors That Facilitate or Impede the Development of Beginning Teachers' Professional Knowledge and Practice, and Their Professional Identity?

Six of the ten study participants commenced their teaching careers in schools in which nationally driven or locally devised induction initiatives were being implemented. Consequently, the beginning teachers in these schools experienced significantly higher levels of support than did their other new teacher peers. Chief among the goals of these former schools was the orientation of their newly appointed teachers to the school, in tandem with the provision of a range of personal and professional supports. As a result, multiple supports were provided for these teachers, although some specific initiatives were confined to the schools in which the National Pilot Project on Teacher Induction (NPPTI) was operating. These supports included information about the school, curriculum matters and organisational procedures. The new teachers engaged in reasonably regular observation of their more experienced colleagues teaching age groups and addressing areas of the curriculum of the new teachers' choosing.

Each newly qualified teacher was assigned a veteran colleague to serve as mentor and who in turn provided ongoing advice, guidance and support. The novices participated in external networks through which targeted continuing professional development was provided. Some school-based, out-of-class time was provided to facilitate their engagement in planning activity and to

provide opportunities for them to liaise with pertinent members of school staff. While each of the induction supports was considered by the early-career teachers as aiding their entry into the teaching profession, the assignment of a mentor and the provision of opportunities to engage in the observation of their more experienced colleagues were the aspects that were judged as being most supportive and effective. However, engagement in the observation of veteran colleagues did not embody a more cognitive apprenticeship approach to mentoring (Collins et al., 1989), as minimal opportunities for pre- and post-observation discourse were available in which the intentions of the mentor and the interpretations of the mentee were addressed. The schools in which structured induction supports were provided were also characterised by the existence of more open and collegial working cultures. Opportunities for team teaching with special education teachers and for engagement in collaborative planning with same-grade teachers were more regular features of these schools.

The other four beginning teachers who taught in schools in which no formal induction structures were being implemented variously experienced feelings of isolation and of having to develop their professional competence at a distinct remove from their more experienced colleagues. As a result of being left to their own devices, much of their learning about pupils and about school context relied on the initiative of the new teachers themselves or occurred by chance or through incidental encounters. Regular frustrations

were experienced by these new teachers as they strove to find their fit with the school and the fit of what they were doing in their classroom with the wider learning taking place. Due to the non-allocation of mentors, they lacked opportunities to readily engage in dialogue about teaching and learning and to seek guidance on curriculum and other matters as and when they were pertinent to them. Frequently they were unsure of important school protocols and procedures and discovered their existence post the occurrence of particular events. While this type of discovery was not confined to the schools in which structured induction mechanisms had not been established, it occurred with greater regularity in them. In these schools, a culture of individualism and respect for the privacy of the individual teacher predominated (Hargreaves, 1994; Williams et al., 2001). Opportunities to engage in collaborative planning were minimally provided for as were opportunities for teachers to work together in implementing teaching and learning initiatives.

Two additional and related site-based factors also served as barriers to the induction of some of the newly qualified teachers. Each new teacher who was appointed in an all-boys' primary school experienced their classes as being particularly challenging. While one cannot make a presumption as to whether or not the classes assigned were a reflection of the level of challenge inherent in all classes in these schools, they were categorically experienced as being particularly difficult classes in which to begin one's

teaching career. These teachers also regularly struggled with the outcomes of the class-based and schoolwide challenges being experienced in these schools in ensuring the consistent implementation of effective discipline measures and norms of respect. The combination of these two factors resulted in the process of learning to teach in these all-boys' primary schools being experienced as significantly more challenging than in the co-educational or all-girls' schools in these same geographic areas.

7.2.5 How Might Support for Beginning Teachers in Urban Primary Schools in Designated Areas of Socio-economic Disadvantage Be Improved?

In identifying how existing supports might be further developed and how additional supports might be introduced, it should be assumed that the induction enablers previously discussed would automatically merge with the proposals which follow.

This study confirms, as Feiman-Nemser (2003) argues, that initial teacher education, irrespective of the nature and duration of the pre-service course undertaken, cannot produce a newly qualified teacher who is capable of making a seamless transition into a first teaching position. It is therefore imperative that schools take ownership of the induction of their new teachers in partnership with the range of education partners. For many novices, their appointment to a school in a designated area of socio-economic

disadvantage may result in an acute level of dissonance between their experiences to date and the demands that are inherent in their newly acquired position. Therefore new teachers must be enabled to address any such cultural mismatch in a structured manner in order that negative perceptions and characterisations of diversity might be overtly addressed (Achinstein & Barrett, 2004). The process of familiarisation with school context should begin in advance of the commencement of the new school year through the provision of opportunities to visit the school and to meet with the principal and key members of staff in advance of the return of pupils. Such encounters should allow for the discussion of pertinent aspects of school life and practice, in particular the school's disadvantage status and its attendant curriculum, organisational, pastoral and resource commitments. They should also serve to introduce the newly appointed teacher to his or her work environment and to allow them to begin the personally important process of preparing their classroom for the arrival of their first cohort of pupils.

As the new teacher adjusts to the physical surroundings and its personnel, attention should be afforded to the sharing of the schools' learning goals and priorities for its pupils and how they fit with and should be manifested in the individual classroom of the novice (Feiman-Nemser, 2001b). Early attendance to whole-school curriculum commitments is imperative if the new teacher is to situate what he or she does in the context of the school's

overarching commitments and the national targets for such schools. As part of this process, opportunities to interact professionally with members of staff who fulfil a wide range of roles and responsibilities with which the new teacher may be invariably familiar is important to aid his or her socialisation. Critical to the sense of professional security of the novice is their understanding of the range of organisational procedures that are very much taken for granted by their more experienced colleagues. If the newly appointed teacher is to be expected to implement the school's agreed procedures for addressing a plethora of whole-school activities, they must first be aware of and familiar with that which is expected of them in a practical sense.

Beginning teachers are consistently struck by the degree of pupil diversity, ability and need that is presented to them on entering their classroom in a school in a designated area of socio-economic disadvantage. For some of them, such experiences may be relatively novel and simultaneously disquieting. Their emerging conceptions of themselves as teachers require opportunities for formal articulation. In consultation with an assigned mentor, they need to have opportunities to consider their own overt and hidden biases (Feiman-Nemser, 2001a) and their relevance in their newly acquired environment. In tandem with this collaborative deliberation they need to learn about their pupils and the community within which they work and come to respect it and to learn how to utilise its richness.

New teachers need to engage in dialogue with their school's experienced and expert practitioners to consider how best they might teach their diversity of pupils. In so doing, a more educative-mentoring approach as advocated by Feiman-Nemser (2001a) should be adopted. Aspects of practice in which early-career teachers identify the need for professional development, such as their capacity to adequately and effectively differentiate learning opportunities, should form part of a personal but collaboratively devised learning agenda. Learning experience must be grounded in the classroom context of the new teacher (Gilbert, 2005) and be ever cognisant of the complexity and fluidity of their developmental and professional needs. Teaching is complex for both novice and veteran alike (Cochran-Smith & Paris, 1995), but the novice has a significantly lesser breadth of experience to fall back on and therefore must be facilitated in a manner that fosters their continued learning and growth.

Although engagement in professional dialogue with assigned mentors is critical, it should not be restricted to them. The prevalence of informal mentoring and structured opportunities to foster collegial relations and professional dialogue (S. M. Wilson & Berne, 1999) is a crucial ingredient in effective induction. The onus should not always be placed on the new teacher to be the initiator of guidance and advice, but it should flow naturally from veteran colleagues. In a similar vein, the responsibilities of the principal for the induction of newly qualified teachers should not be confined to

management and organisational functions. The principal's ultimate responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning provided in the school should be exhibited through sustained engagement with the newly appointed teacher characterised by pertinent guidance, constructive feedback and focused affirmation.

The provision of regular opportunities for the novice to observe the practice of other teachers and to be in turn observed by their mentor or other experienced colleagues is vital if systemic inquiry into classroom practice is to be cultivated (Bartell, 2005; Feiman-Nemser, 2001a). This should include structured opportunities for engagement in genuine team teaching initiatives in real and meaningful contexts involving sustained interaction and collaborative planning, resourcing, implementation, differentiation and assessment. Engagement in formal and informal conversations about practice at a remove from the classroom or the intermittent unsupported observation of one-off lessons falls significantly short of this goal.

Authentic observation should involve engagement in collaborative dialogue about what is being looked for and subsequently what has been seen and learned (Collins et al., 1989). In so doing novices need to be encouraged to pose questions that have a particular significance for them and their work but also to construct their responses in tandem with their mentor or experienced colleague. The simple provision of solutions to new teacher queries

bypasses the expertise they bring to their first teaching post and fails to cultivate their reflective practice. In steering clear of a quick-fix mentality, mentors or experienced colleagues should encourage new teachers to focus outwards beyond the obvious, to turn confusions into questions, to trial new ways of working and to evaluate their impacts (Feiman-Nemser, 2001a). Beginning teachers should in turn receive ample feedback on their performance in the context of a two-way dialogue. In so doing, the provision of support should be balanced with the exploitation of opportunities for growth. Areas in which scope for development is identified should be sensitively but decisively addressed (Cains & Brown, 1998). In constructing and addressing the shared agenda for observation and ongoing dialogue, the contributions of novice and veteran should be equally valid as should the shared and varied means of addressing them. It should also be remembered that while the mentor or experienced teacher brings many years of practice and well-established expertise to the induction encounter, the strengths and creative potential of the new teacher should also be formally acknowledged (Tickle, 2000) and productively utilised in the context of both induction and whole-school interactions.

In supporting the induction of newly qualified teachers attention should be afforded to the co-occurring process of probation. If beginning teachers are to effectively realise the competence standards inherent in probation, they must first gain a deeper understanding of the standards they must achieve

(McNally & Gray, 2006). The enhanced sharing of standards in a manner that is equally accessible to probationers, principals, mentors and relevant others alike is vital. Such standards should be used in turn to shape school-based collaborative discussions about teaching (Darling-Hammond, 1997). They should also be used more overtly by the Inspectorate in its encounters with individual probationary teachers with instances of feedback being steadily replaced by conversations about teaching and learning founded on the new teacher's practice that has been observed. Standards for beginning teachers need to become capacity enhancing (Bartell, 2005) rather than solely measures of competence and be systematically and continually worked through by beginning teachers in their classrooms and in collaboration with their more veteran colleagues.

7.2.6 How Does a Study of These Changes Assist Us to Understand the Process of Professional Socialisation?

Engagement in this inquiry and the subsequent analysis and discussion of its findings provide much assistance in understanding the process of socialisation into the primary teaching profession, most particularly in urban schools in designated areas of socio-economic disadvantage. This study confirms that learning to teach and assuming the professional identity of teacher is a complex and idiosyncratic process. It is not simply about developing the competence of beginning practitioners to impart knowledge and to hone the skills and attitudes of their pupils (McNally & Gray, 2006). It

involves developing the capacity of the new teacher to effectively use the content knowledge and pedagogical skills acquired in initial teacher education through the enactment of teaching, and through engagement in observation, dialogue and reflection. It is about making the transition from knowing about teaching to knowing how to teach, and including the identity of 'teacher' in one's life.

Learning to teach and becoming a teacher is a highly individualised endeavour. This research has shown that no two beginning teachers experience the process of socialisation into the primary teaching profession in exactly the same way. Learning to teach is inherently bound up in the person, the values, attitudes, beliefs and dispositions that the new teacher brings to his or her first teaching position and which have been previously refashioned in the course of pre-service education. On entering their first teaching position, beginning teachers' ongoing interactions with aspects of school culture and with pupils, colleagues and parents result in a continual recasting of their emerging identity (Smagorinsky et al., 2004). Teacher as 'practitioner' and teacher as 'person' cannot be separated and the evolution of one is integrally intertwined with the emergence of the other.

During their seminal first year in teaching, the beginning teachers attended to a wide range of concerns in their newly acquired social contexts. Commonalities, such as relationships (Clement & Vanderberghe, 2001;

Manuel & Hughes, 2006), management (Bezzina, 2006; Flores & Day, 2006), pupils' learning (Bullough & Draper, 2004; Watzke, 2007), organisation (Department of Education and Science Inspectorate, 2005) and probation (Killeavy & Murphy, 2005) were prevalent. However, in response to the central tenets of symbolic interactionism as proposed by Blumer (1969), the extent to which the new teachers variously attended to these issues and the manner of their attendance was in response to the meanings that these issues held for them. In defining them and in assessing their relative importance, the new teachers engaged in prolonged interaction with themselves and with others in their schools. Interactions with pupils, principals, colleagues, parents and self served to aid the process of meaning-making and in turn instigated various courses of action.

Meanings and definitions proved to be continually shifting and evolving entities, and they were equally prone to changes in constitution and subsequent action by experiences of success or disappointment in the classroom. Other personally held meanings and definitions, such as the implementation of strict classroom management practices or engagement in planning primarily in response to the requirements of probation, proved more resistant to modification. They were sustained to a considerable extent by the strength of their pre-existing meanings for the individual novice concerned or by his or her self-selected affiliation to particular significant

others or reference groups who in turn provided active support for the recognition and preservation of existing definitions and actions.

Significant others (Cooley, 1970) and reference groups (Nias, 1985; Shibutani, 1955) were found to play a notably influential role in the beginning teachers' evaluation of their professional competence and on the image they held of themselves as emerging teaching practitioners. Interactions with pupils, colleagues, parents and inspectors were utilised by the new teachers in constructing and reconstructing how they viewed themselves. Many of the early-career teachers remained continually conscious of minimising occasions in which they might appear outwardly and publicly deficient (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). Experiences of negative interpersonal interactions, or experiences that were personally perceived as such by the newly qualified teachers, proved to have a traumatic impact on their sense of self-as-teacher. The converse also proved to be true. Expressions of affirmation, recognition and affection from significant others and reference groups served to bolster their professional confidence and self-esteem. Such expressions served to enhance for the new teachers their personal and professional standing in the classroom and school, their sense of fit with their school community, and their personally held image of themselves as primary teachers.

But the beginning teachers were not solely defined and directed by the outcomes of their interactions with others within the school community. They continually proved that they were capable of initiating action and reflecting on it in their own right (Blumer, 1969; Charmaz, 2006). With the acquisition of increased experience and professional confidence, they displayed a greater capacity to action personally interpreted meanings and definitions and to do so with ever more positive outcomes for the quality of teaching and learning and for the evolution of their professional identity. For some, this brought them occasionally into conflict with existing school norms and practices, such as in the context of their schools' special education practices. Despite this apparent collision and the prospect of acrimony, the early-career teachers demonstrated their resolve and conviction in pursuing their desired courses of action as they were judged by them to be in the best interest of their pupils.

While commencing one's professional career in a school in a designated area of socio-economic disadvantage is regularly regarded as being more challenging than doing so in a more advantaged area, this inquiry has confirmed that this generally held assumption should not be considered to be universally valid. While the schools in which the study participants commenced their careers provided a variable blend of challenges, they equally presented a host of personally and professionally enhancing opportunities. As in the Johnson and Birkeland (2003) study, schools that

were characterised as having more open and collaborative cultures and in which norms of respect and behaviour were consistently promoted proved to be positive and constructive socialising environments. The teachers who had secured positions in these schools experienced comparatively higher levels of personal and professional validation and in turn expressed a greater degree of commitment to continuing in their schools for the longer term.

This study has strongly confirmed that the process of induction and socialisation is far from concluded at the end of the first year in teaching. New teachers enter the teaching profession with significantly differing conceptions of the type of teacher they wish to become. They come armed with variously devised visions of good teaching and accompanying diverse capacities to implement those visions. Beginning to teach in areas of educational disadvantage is inherently different from commencing one's career in a more advantaged school. For the new teachers who participated in this study it presented a diversity of pupils, a range of ability levels, widely varying family and community circumstances, a breadth of school-based interventions and a daily experience governed by unpredictability. Learning to teach in such environments therefore requires multiple forms of learning. Each of the beginning teachers possessed learning needs that were pertinent and unique to them. These needs did not remain static but evolved over time, with some needs becoming redundant and new needs emerging. Despite the successful completion of their general inspection and the

subsequent awarding of fully qualified status, the new teachers did not judge themselves to be fully formed teachers at the end of their first year in teaching. For many of them, they saw themselves as having completed a seminal phase in becoming and being a competent practitioner. For others, the successful completion of the probation process marked for them the commencement of the "real" learning phase.

7.3 Strengths and Limitations of the Current Study

One of the key strengths of this inquiry is its prolonged engagement with the study participants over the course of their first year in teaching. The adoption of this sustained approach allowed the researcher to establish a cordial and constructive relationship with them. It facilitated her to genuinely get to know them as persons and as emerging teachers and for them in turn to be open and honest in sharing their first-year experiences. It allowed for the visiting and revisiting of pertinent issues and it readily accommodated the inquiry's commitment to unearthing and teasing through the evolution of beginning teachers' attitudes, beliefs and practices. As a result of the relationship that emerged between the researcher and the study participants and their commitment to the research process, each beginning teacher opted to remain as a participant to the study's completion despite the additional requirements it placed on them in an already demand laden year. The continued involvement of all participants resulted in the creation of a quantity

of narrative-rich stories and accounts that could in turn be verified and validated by the study participants themselves.

The breadth of issues addressed by this study also contributes to its research value. The questions asked in the course of the periodic interviews were not in any sense prescriptive or literally pursued. While being used as a loose steer to guide face-to-face encounters, they did not preclude the emergence of other issues pertinent to individual beginning teachers or to them as a group of emerging professionals. Topics that were addressed in the reflective journals could be revisited and expounded upon at interview stage. By engaging in narrative dialogue, the study participants' capacities to recall significant events and to engage in the subsequent analysis of and reflection on those happenings were powerfully made possible. The prior concern of the researcher that she might be called upon to offer counsel, advice or support did not materialise. Therefore the authenticity of the early-career teachers' experiences was faithfully reflected in the accounts that emerged and that were subsequently analysed and written about.

The location of this inquiry across five DEIS Band 1 and Band 2 primary schools in designated areas of socio-economic disadvantage (Department of Education and Science, 2005a) provided a genuine richness of school context. The town schools from which the study participants were drawn included a blend of co-educational, boys', girls', junior, senior and full-vertical

schools that varied significantly in size. The group of schools included two that were participating in the NPPTI for the first time, one that was implementing an induction programme generated from within its own resources and two that had no structured induction mechanisms in place. This assortment could be judged to create a degree of disarray; however from the researcher's perspective this cohort of schools effortlessly reflected the diversity of naturally occurring, learning-to-teach environments.

However, the research design for this inquiry is not without its weaknesses. Each of the newly qualified teachers who participated in this study volunteered to do so, despite the significant levels of personal commitment required of them during an onerous career phase. While this self-selection by the study participants does not in turn cause them to be an atypical cohort, the findings that emerge from engagement with them cannot be guaranteed to mirror the early-career experiences of beginning teachers more generally. The findings are intended to be illuminative, relatable (Bassey, 1981) and transferable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to the experiences of other beginning teachers rather than being stringently generalisable to them.

It is also important to state that while the researcher had a long-established professional relationship with the schools in which the newly qualified teachers were appointed, she had no direct relationship with any of the study

participants prior to the research commencing. Although she relinquished all advisory and evaluative functions in relation to each of the study participants to Inspectorate colleagues, she continued to have responsibility for the probation process of their beginning teacher colleagues in four of the five participant schools due to work-related exigencies.

It should be noted that the induction of newly qualified teachers is an interactive process in which multiple actors play a role. Key among those players are principals, mentors and significant colleagues. Despite this overt acknowledgement of their importance and the likely contribution to the study their inclusion might make, it was decided that the sole contributors to the research process would be the beginning teachers themselves. In the initial design stage of this study, it was recognised that these influential members of the school community would provide important perspectives on their beginning teachers' first year in the profession and that they would also serve to mediate and triangulate the contributions of the novices. However, as this inquiry is intended to afford primacy to the voice and experiences of the beginning teachers themselves, the inclusion of alternative voices and perspectives was deemed inappropriate. While such other voices would provide alternative viewpoints, they would not serve to change the experiences of the new teachers as they had experienced them themselves. The centrality of personal meaning-making in the social context of the school is fundamental to this study and was undeserving of compromise.

7.4 The Relevance of This Work to Educational Policy and Practice

This study was commenced with the aspiration of making a contribution to the understanding of the education community of the idiosyncratic and complex nature of learning to teach and assuming the identity of teacher in primary schools in designated areas of socio-economic disadvantage. It is hoped that its findings will embody both resonance and impact for those charged with the responsibility of developing and implementing educational policy and practice. This study will also serve to contribute to an emerging Irish literature on the processes of becoming a primary teacher as well as the vast international literature on this topic. The location of this inquiry in the strand of primary schools widely perceived as being the most challenging in which to commence one's teaching career will add to its contribution.

For the Department of Education and Science this research provides an authentic insight into and an in-depth analysis of the reality of learning to teach in DEIS Band 1 and Band 2 schools (Department of Education and Science, 2005a). In so doing, it signposts a number of pertinent directions for the continued evolution of induction policy and practice in Ireland. This study strongly confirms the value and contribution of the introduction of a nationally coordinated induction initiative for newly appointed teachers. It highlights the professional and moral obligation for the extension of such supports to all primary schools. It confirms that the process of socialisation is only partially concluded at the end of a new teacher's first year in the profession and it

underscores the necessity to provide formally structured induction support that is developmentally responsive to individual early-career teachers' needs beyond this initial period. Primary schools in designated areas of socio-economic disadvantage are characterised as having a greater proportion of newly qualified teachers on their staffs and a more regular turnover of such personnel. In allocating induction resources, due cognisance should be taken of this fact and additional supports provided to such schools. In order to inform policy on the teaching profession generally, high-quality statistical and attitudinal data should be compiled on teacher recruitment and retention. In particular, such research should provide insights into how, why and under what conditions, both professionally and personally, teachers are recruited, retained and depart primary schools in designated areas of socio-economic disadvantage.

In examining the interface between the Department's Inspectorate and probationary teachers, it is hoped that the personal insights and experiences as proffered by the new teachers themselves will further aid the Inspectorate in fulfilling its support, advisory and evaluative roles. Foregrounding the experience of the probationer should assist in realising a new level of mutual understanding and in ensuring that pertinent and targeted supports are provided for newly qualified teachers through inspectors' direct encounters with the novices themselves, as well as through their interactions with principals and mentors. This study confirms the need for the Inspectorate-

generated evaluation criteria used to assess probationary teachers' progress to be communicated to newly qualified teachers through a range of media so as to facilitate their acquisition of an informed understanding of the meaning and application of these criteria. In the context of the legislative allocation of responsibility for induction and probation to the Teaching Council, it is expected that a more guiding and active role will be forthcoming in overseeing the implementation of a quality continuum of support from initial teacher education to induction.

For the colleges of teacher education and universities, education centres and the providers of induction and continuing professional development, this study provides a first-hand account of how a group of early-career teachers experienced the transition from initial teacher education to their first full-time appointments in primary schools. This study affirms the contribution of various aspects of current pre-service and induction provision. However, it also points to a range of clearly articulated needs. In particular, increased attention should be afforded to the development of student teachers' competence and confidence to address the breadth of the primary school curriculum, to respond to a diversity of learners' abilities and needs, and to utilise a variety of effective teaching methodologies and approaches. The specific learning needs as identified by beginning teachers, including differentiation, assessment and classroom management, should become integral and frequently addressed components of pre-service provision. In

structuring the series of teaching practice experiences, every effort should be made to ensure that student teachers experience a breadth of school and classroom contexts, including opportunities to gain first-hand experience of teaching in primary schools in designated areas of socio-economic disadvantage.

In acknowledging the continuum of support necessitated to ensure the development of teaching professionals, the relationships between the colleges of teacher education and universities, education centres and providers of induction and continuing professional development should be further strengthened. As a result of such collaboration, all early-career teachers should be provided with structured and ongoing opportunities to address the interface between theory previously considered and their day-to-day practices in their newly acquired classrooms. As part of this programme of support and in tandem with their employing schools, new teachers should be facilitated to avail themselves of support from a range of sources according to their needs, including through the newly amalgamated Primary Professional Development Service in addition to well-structured and responsive online support systems. However, the provision of such induction and mentoring supports should extend systemically beyond support for the individual teacher to serve as a means of building professional cultures of teaching in schools.

For school management, mentors and teaching colleagues, acquiring a genuine appreciation of how beginning teachers actually experience their socialisation into the teaching profession is critical. Accessing the voice of the new teacher is vital in deciding on the nature of the induction supports to be provided and on the manner of their provision. The induction of newly appointed teachers should become a whole-school concern, embodying a collaboratively devised and implemented support and advisory dimension that is meaningfully responsive to the needs of the individual beginning teacher. In so doing, the promotion of collegial observation and interaction, which has the enhancement of teaching and learning at its core, is critical. Such observation must embody observation of the newly qualified teachers at work in their classrooms, as well as the more traditional and widely accepted observation of accomplished and veteran colleagues. If collegial observation and interaction are to be effective, they must be purposefully structured. They must ensure that the outcomes of conventional observation, namely the replication of existing practices through the exchange of quick-fix solutions, are consistently replaced by the authentic engagement of teaching professionals in genuinely collaborative dialogue and in systemic inquiry into what teachers do and how pupils learn best.

Such commitments should be complemented by the allocation of judiciously selected and trained mentors for all newly qualified teachers, with the required accompanying supports to ensure that mentor-mentee professional

engagement occurs on a sustained and appropriately intensive basis. School-based initiatives should also incorporate opportunities for new teachers to contribute their knowledge and understanding to whole-school developments so as to deter the establishment of a deficit approach to beginning teacher professional competence. In attending to their learning needs, due cognisance should be afforded to supporting the development of their professional identity by multifarious means. The promotion of teacher as both person and practitioner should become integral to all socialisation interventions and initiatives.

For the beginning teachers themselves this study highlights the need for them to take a lead and proactive role in the development of their own professional competence and professional identity during their pre-service and induction experiences. The ability to cultivate a clear vision of good teaching and learning, and the capacity to enact that vision in the classroom requires commitment, diligence and a willingness to reflect and develop professionally. In so doing, they must draw on their personal and professional reserves but also be open to accepting and seeking out the guidance and support of others. Learning to teach and learning to be a teacher are difficult and demanding. However, the process of becoming a teacher is equally invigorating and transformative. Evolving into a competent professional with the capacity to generate "interest, enthusiasm, inquiry,

excitement, discovery, risk-taking and fun" (Woods & Jeffrey, 1996, p. 71) makes the first-year journey worthwhile.

7.5 Recommendations for Further Research

Engagement in this research highlights some areas in which future research could develop. These include:

- A follow-up study with the ten beginning teachers who participated in this research is worthy of consideration. In continuing this inquiry, attention should be focused on the manner in which their teaching careers continued to evolve, the degree to which they continued/discontinued in their current schools and their associated encounters of becoming increasingly experienced teaching professionals. In particular, gaining insight into why some early-career teachers are negatively affected by their experiences of working in schools in designated areas of socio-economic disadvantage while others are professionally fulfilled and committed to continuing to teach in such schools would be beneficial.

- Further research on the development of the professional competence and the professional identity of newly qualified teachers appointed to primary schools in designated areas of socio-economic disadvantage would be of value. Such further research should be structured to focus more particularly on the influence of differing models of initial teacher

education including undergraduate and postgraduate routes, and college-based and employment-based routes. Opportunities should also be availed of to access the perspectives of principals, mentors and significant colleagues in tandem with those of the early-career teachers themselves. In so doing, credence should be afforded to the power differentials that inherently exist between the different school personnel. The employment of an action research approach would allow existing induction enhancing facets to be built on and identified challenges to the socialisation of beginning teachers to be addressed in a formative rather than traditionally summative fashion.

- Further research into the existing model of primary teacher probation in Ireland in which induction and probation co-occur and in which newly qualified teachers' professional competence is externally assessed by the Inspectorate would be insightful. Any such inquiry should examine the appropriateness of the current model in which the supportive process of induction and socialisation into the teaching profession co-exists with the evaluative and judgemental process of probation.
- Much attention has been afforded in Ireland (Department of Education and Science, 2005c) and in other jurisdictions to the issue of the number of males entering primary teaching. Research into the particular experiences of male beginning primary teachers in a female dominated

profession would serve to significantly broaden the existing literature on this matter. The provision of rigorous research on male beginning teachers' actual experiences of the profession would serve to illuminate the possible existence of differing motivations, conceptions of self-as-teacher and preferred career trajectories in comparison to their female counterparts.

7.6 Conclusion

Beginning primary teaching is a unique and special experience for each novice who enters the full-time classroom for the first time. It marks a significant transition from initial teacher education and intermittent periods of teaching practice. It presents newly qualified teachers with a myriad of challenges and opportunities, and it signifies a period of deep learning and discovery. Commencing one's teaching career in an urban primary school in a designated area of socio-economic disadvantage has the capacity to be energising, rewarding and fulfilling. It provides its own distinctive and powerful context in which to learn to do what teachers do and be what teachers are on the journey to fully fledged status and public and personal recognition as 'teacher'.

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APPENDIX 1

Emerging as a Teacher - Information Statement

1. What is the research about?

This research is about examining the experiences of beginning teachers in their first year of teaching in urban primary schools participating in the school support programme. It will explore the learning that they go through in learning to do what teachers do and how their professional identity, self-as-teacher, evolves over the course of their first year.

2. Who is conducting the research?

The research is being undertaken by myself, Mags Jordan. I am a former primary teacher and I currently work as a primary schools' inspector. I am undertaking the research as part of a Doctorate in Education with St Patrick's College, Drumcondra. I have chosen this area due to my significant interest in the issues of beginning teaching and educational disadvantage.

3. Why is this research important?

Presently there is little Irish-generated research about beginning teaching in primary schools in designated areas of disadvantage. It is a widely held view that such schools need the highest calibre teachers. Therefore beginning teachers' entry into the teaching profession ought to be supported and to do so their learning needs must be understood.

4. Who are the participants?

The ten participants will be drawn from a range of urban primary schools throughout the county. They will be fully qualified permanent or temporary teachers serving a minimum one-year contract and in their first year of teaching. They will be teaching in mainstream classes and be eligible for probation.

5. What will the participants have to do?

The participants will work with the researcher over the course of their first year in teaching. This will involve three elements: interviews, journals and classroom observations. The interviews will allow for the sharing of conversations about everyday happenings and will take place at intervals throughout the school year. The journals will involve short written accounts of significant events that occur throughout the year. The

classroom observations will take place once per term and will involve a visit by me to your classroom to see you at work with your children.

6. Will there be any benefits from participating in this research?

Participation in this research is likely to heighten your awareness of your actions and to clarify your thinking about your role and your personal and professional goals. It is hoped that the outcomes of participation will be perceived as being beneficial to your development as a teacher.

7. What about confidentiality, anonymity and privacy?

All written data (journals) and oral data (interviews) will be safely stored with access to this material being restricted to my supervisor, Dr Mark Morgan, and myself. Great care will be taken in analysing and presenting the data so as to avoid the identity of a participant or his or her school being revealed. Pseudonyms will be given to all participants with specific quotes from participants being used in the final report. Areas that participants do not wish to address will not be discussed. Participants can choose to withdraw from the study at any time and they can subsequently request the removal of any data relating to them. The data collected will not be used for any purpose other than that discussed at the outset without the permission of the participants. The legal limitations to data confidentiality inherent in child protection legislation will be upheld.

8. What if the researcher is also my inspector for probation?

If I am scheduled to be your assigned inspector for probation and you wish to volunteer to participate in this study, one of my colleagues will become your assigned inspector. The probation process will continue as normal.

9. What happens next?

I would ask you to consider the points discussed at our meeting today and to share your thoughts with a critical colleague or friend. If there are further questions that you would like to ask me, please do not hesitate to get in touch. If you would like to volunteer to participate in this study, please contact me directly or inform your principal/mentor. I will then contact you to discuss the details of the study further.

APPENDIX 2

Emerging as a Teacher – Interview 1

1. Tell me about yourself and why you decided to go into primary teaching:
 - Experiences of own schooling
 - Family history of teaching
 - Other work-related experiences (postgraduate teachers)
 - Teacher education college, especially teaching practices
2. Tell me about the kind of teacher you would like to be:
 - Person
 - Professional qualities and skills – how to make teaching and learning happen effectively
3. Tell me about your sense of confidence and competence moving from a teacher-education setting into a full-time teaching setting:
 - Lead teaching and learning
 - Deal with all the attendant responsibilities: parents, colleagues, management etc.
4. Tell me about how you came to be teaching here in X school and what you knew about the school before you came:
 - DEIS Band 1/2 status
 - Manner in which educational disadvantage issues addressed in college
5. Tell me about what it has been like during your first days and weeks here, particularly in your own classroom:
 - Positive/challenging experiences to date
 - Possible immediate concerns, e.g. planning, probation etc.
 - Extent of enjoyment of initial weeks
 - Sense of 'fitting in'
6. Tell me about the support that you have been receiving since joining the staff here in X school, e.g. principal, mentor, same-class teachers, other beginning teachers, external support etc.
 - Source(s)
 - Usefulness
 - Outstanding needs and how they might best be met

Emerging as a Teacher – Interview 2

1. It's quite a number of weeks now since we last spoke; tell me about how things have been going for you in the interim?
2. Tell me about how you're finding the probation process overall
 - Planning and preparation
 - Visit from your inspector (where relevant)
3. Tell me about the areas of practice that you feel you're really finding your feet with
 - Particular areas that are still proving somewhat problematic
 - School supports considered helpful
 - Outside-school supports (if any)
4. How has your reflective journal been going for you?
 - Ease of completion
 - Problem-solving
 - Impact on thinking and practice
5. If I were to ask you about the key things for you that you have learned about teaching since you've started out this year, what would they be?
 - Use of innovative teaching approaches – practical examples
 - Comparison of the reality of everyday school life and your experiences of college lectures and teaching practice
6. What are the key things that you have learned about how children learn?
 - Significant changes in thinking (if any) since you started out at the beginning of the school year
 - Opportunities for collaborative learning etc. (how do children learn best) – practical examples
7. As the end of the first term is just around the corner, how does that make you feel?
 - Enjoyment of teaching work – doing what teachers do
 - Sense of self-as-teacher
 - Relationships with pupils
 - Sense of belonging to the school

Emerging as a Teacher – Interview 3

1. It's been a couple of months now since we last spoke; how have things been going for you in the interim?
2. You've done your mini-dip since we last spoke. I'd be very interested to hear about it
 - How it went and how you felt about it
 - The feedback and guidance you received from your Inspector
 - What happens next – additional visit/dip day
3. Tell me about the areas of practice that you feel you're really succeeding with at this stage in your first year
 - Any areas that are still proving somewhat problematic
 - School and other supports, e.g. support networks considered helpful
 - NPPTI schools – usefulness of specific supports
4. We talked at our very first meeting about your school participating in the DEIS programme. What have been your experiences of educational disadvantage in your school
 - Pupil behaviour and engagement
 - Homework
 - Parental involvement
 - Other
5. If I were to ask you about the key things for you that you have learned about good teaching, what would they be?
 - Use of innovative teaching approaches – practical examples
6. What are the key things that you have learned about how children learn?
 - Use of innovative learning approaches – practical examples
7. You're now more than half way through your first 'official' year in teaching, how does that make you feel?
 - Enjoyment of teaching work – doing what teachers do
 - Sense of self-as-teacher
 - Relationships with pupils
 - Sense of belonging to the school

Emerging as a Teacher - Interview 4

1. You've done your dip since we last spoke. I'd be very interested to hear about it
 - How you felt leading up to the day and getting ready for it
 - How it went and how you felt about it
 - The feedback you received from your Inspector
 - The reaction from your principal and colleagues
 - How do you feel about yourself as a teacher now that the process is successfully concluded
2. One of the aims of my research is to improve the supports that are provided for future beginning teachers. Based on your experience of your probationary year, what were the areas of your practice that you would have liked/needed most assistance with?
3. At this stage what stands out for you as being key learning/learning moments this year?
4. If you could go back and make any changes to the year you've just had what would they be?
5. We've talked over the course of the year about what you think makes a good teacher, the kinds of qualities and skills that a good teacher has. Looking back on a very important year in your teaching career, what do you think now are those essential qualities and skills?
6. What does your future hold for you?
 - Permanent/temporary in school
 - Looking for a job elsewhere
 - Career break/other
 - Longer term aspirations
7. What are your thoughts about the profession to which you now belong?
 - Views re decision to go into teaching
 - School community to which you now belong
 - Enjoyment/fulfilment of chosen career
8. Other issues – not raised via the questions

APPENDIX 3

**Emerging as a Teacher
Research Project**

**Term 1
Reflective Journal**

Participant 1

Guidelines for Completing Your Reflective Journal

- 1. What is the value of reflection and keeping a reflective journal?**
Engagement in reflection and the maintenance of a reflective journal will help you to take responsibility for your own learning and to develop your professional practice. In reflecting on everyday events as they occur in your classroom and school, you will become more critical regarding what constitutes good and effective teaching. It is a way for you as a beginning teacher to develop an understanding of your professional beliefs, judgements and practices and in turn to positively influence them.
- 2. What is expected of me in keeping my reflective journal during my first term of teaching?**
Your reflective journal has been designed so as to allow you to record critical incidents as and when they occur during your first term of teaching.
- 3. What is a critical incident?**
A critical incident is a surprise or a problematic situation that stimulates you to think about your practice as a beginning teacher and/or to seek a solution to a problem. Most critical incidents are not highly sensational events but may be minor incidents, small everyday events that happen in your classroom and in your school. The criticality of a particular incident is based on its significance and meaning for you.
- 4. How regularly should I complete my reflective journal?**
Some project participants may choose to complete their reflective journal daily, while for others a couple of entries may be included per week. The regularity of entries will depend upon the frequency with which incidents occur that are critical and meaningful for you.
- 5. How do I complete the critical incident template?**
As stated earlier, a critical incident is frequently a commonplace event that occurs in your routine professional practice. It is strongly recommended that you complete your journal entry as close to the critical incident occurring as possible. Doing so will aid your recall of the event and facilitate your reflection on and analysis of it. In completing the template, you are asked to include the date, time and location of the critical incident. You are encouraged to give the event a title, e.g. teaching maths, supervising in the playground etc. You are then asked to provide an account of the critical incident, that is the series of events as they occurred. Finally, you are invited to engage in a personal analysis of and reflection on the critical incident. Prompt questions are provided to help you in this task but it is not intended that they be followed literally but instead be used to inform your thinking. Engagement in this final element will be crucial in contributing to your professional learning and growth. Critical incident templates can be completed electronically or in handwritten format.
- 6. How does the researcher access my reflective journal?**
If you opt to complete your reflective journal electronically, you will be asked to forward it directly to the researcher via e-mail at the end of each week. If you complete it in handwritten format, you will be asked to forward a photocopy of the relevant pages at the end of each week to the researcher's home address.

Date:	Time:
Location:	
Title:	
Critical Incident Account:	
Analysis of and Reflection on the Critical Incident: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Why did it happen? ▪ What was my role? ▪ How did I feel about what happened? ▪ How might I act in the future on the basis of what happened? ▪ How has what happened influenced my beliefs / assumptions? 	

APPENDIX 4

Emerging as a Teacher – Informed Consent Form

Having met with the principal investigator Mags Jordan to discuss the proposed research, having reviewed the information statement provided by her and having considered the issue of participation in this study with a critical colleague/friend, I wish to confirm that I understand that:

- The research will explore the learning experiences that I will go through during my first year of teaching and the manner in which my professional identity evolves over the course of that year.
- Participation in the study is likely to heighten my awareness of my actions as a teacher and to clarify my thinking about my role and my personal and professional goals.
- Participation in the study is voluntary. I can choose to withdraw from the study at any time and I can subsequently request the removal of any data relating to me.
- Any queries that I have at any point in time concerning the study procedures will be duly answered by the principal investigator.
- Participation in the study will involve me in participating in interviews at regular intervals, maintaining a reflective journal and cooperating with termly classroom observation. While participation in the study will place reasonable demands on my time, the principal investigator will arrange interviews and observations at times and locations (where relevant) that are convenient to me. She will also provide appropriate guidance in the structuring of my reflective journal.
- All written and oral data will be safely stored and access to this material will be restricted to the principal investigator and her supervisor. The data will not be used for any other purpose other than that discussed, without my permission.
- Every effort will be made to ensure the maintenance of confidentiality and anonymity. Great care will be taken in the analysis and the presenting of data so as to avoid my identity or that of my school being revealed. I will be assigned a pseudonym and specific quotes from me will be used in the final report. The legal limitations to data confidentiality inherent in child protection legislation will be upheld.
- Areas that I do not wish to address with the principal investigator will not be probed by her.
- The principal investigator will not fulfil any evaluative function with regard to my probation.

Signature of Participant

Date

APPENDIX 4

Emerging as a Teacher – Informed Consent Form

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